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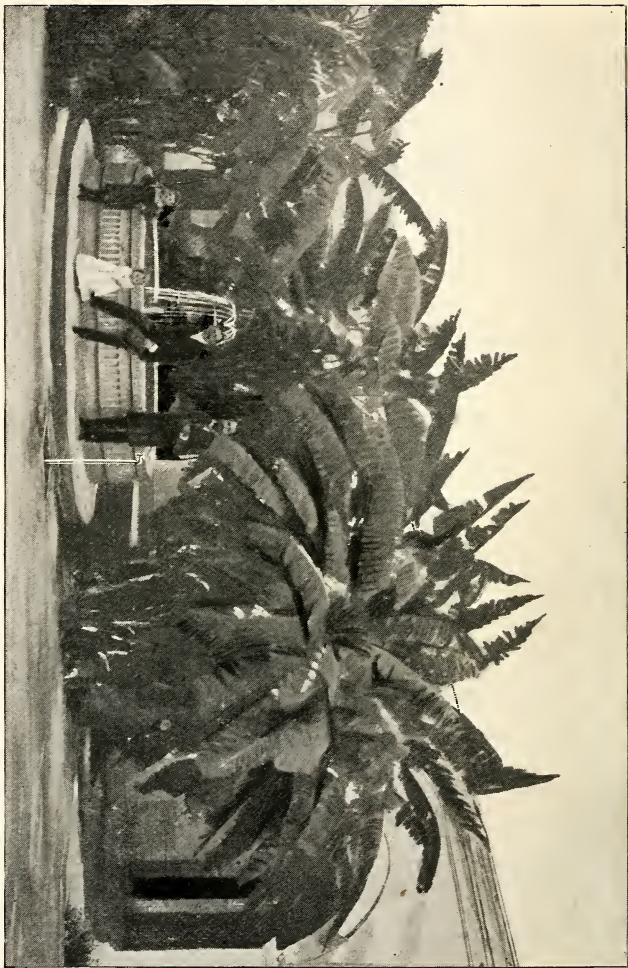




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Court of Madero Institute.

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# THE SEÑORA'S GRANDDAUGHTERS

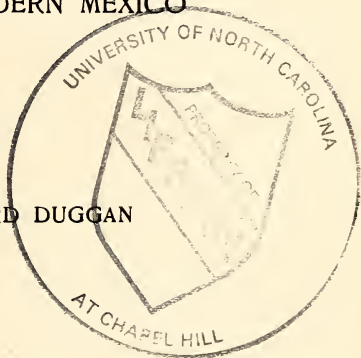
BUD

A TALE OF MODERN MEXICO

Reel  
YD

BY

JANIE PRICHARD DUGGAN



*For a' that, and a' that :  
It's coming yet, for a' that,  
That man to man, the wide world o'er,  
Shall brothers be for a' that.*

—Robert Burns

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From the Society's own Press

*Á la amiga de mi alma*  
**Sara B. Howland**  
*que tendré por mía*  
*no “ hasta la muerte ”*  
*sino hasta el fin de los siglos*



## PREFACE

---

THERE is an Italian proverb which says, "*Tutto il mondo è paese*," which being translated into English, means "All the world's one country," in other words, "All the world's akin."

In telling you, who are to read this tale, about the señora and her granddaughters and their friends, I have been reminded of this Italian proverb.

In one sense, all the world is one country, and these new Mexican acquaintances of yours think and speak and act very much as Americans or English or Italians would under the same circumstances. I would have you understand, therefore, that Mexicans love and hate, live and die, as other human beings do. In a word, there is "a great deal of human nature" in Mexico.

On the other hand, begging the Italian proverb's pardon, each country is a world in itself, in a sense, and it is interesting to study the differences in language, habits, and personal traits, peculiar to the inhabitants of all these worlds contained in the one big world we call the earth.

Now it must be understood that most of the

characters figuring in this little world of which I write, speak the Spanish language. This I shall translate into English for the benefit of your world, with the exception of a few words and phrases here and there, which will be found starred and interpreted in footnotes.

As you are not expected to acquire the Spanish language by reading this book, I will not call attention to any peculiarity of idiom which may appear, and even the delicate use of the pronoun *thou*, with its varied forms, betokening familiarity or affection, has been superseded in the following pages by the stolid and inexpressive *you*.

J. P. D.

SCRANTON, PA., August 21, 1896



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## PART I

### CASA BARREDA

---

Had I but plenty of money, money enough and to spare,  
The house for me, no doubt, were a house in the city  
square;

Ah, such a life, such a life, as one leads at the window  
there!

—*Robert Browning*



## I

THE early morning freshness had left the city streets and gardens by eleven o'clock of St. Joseph's Day in the year 18—. An intense white heat glowed over pavements and flower beds, and the air was strangely still for a March day. The bells in the church towers were holding their tongues at last, after hours of jangling between earth and sky, and the throngs of men, women, and children were lessening in the streets. Most of the religious devotees of Guadalajara had attended the earlier services of the day, and many had returned to their homes on housekeeping cares intent. One church, however, still retained its congregation, for after high mass had been observed, the worshipers had waited for the sermon.

Father Justo Prieto, a young priest lately returned to Mexico from a Spanish college, slipped quietly from the vestry behind the altar and mounted the steps of the pulpit. As he did so, the palace clock struck eleven. The pulpit was an elaborately carved and gilded box, canopied above by a shell-shaped sounding-board, and suspended at the southeastern corner of the open nave above the space where the audience sat and kneeled.

There was no sound in all the great church except the shuffling of coming and departing feet over the paved floor and a faint murmur of praying voices before the shrines. Candles burned on the high altar and on all of the side altars, where life-sized figures of pink and white wax gazed down.

None of the brightness of the outside world penetrated the church, except where the sun, piercing the high, narrow windows, touched the wreaths of incense smoke floating here and there about the altar rail, or threw patches of sickly light upon the stones underfoot. It was cool here, if somewhat close from the odor of incense and of musk, and tired market women rested on the pavement with their baskets at their sides, and way-worn *peons* kneeled fervently before crucifix and altar. Most of the women present wore black, from the top of their shawled heads to the tips of their little high-heeled, pointed shoes. Those of the better class wore black lace scarfs or mantillas over their head and shoulders and black gloves on their small hands.

The priest glanced nervously over the somber scene a few feet below him, and then abruptly began a eulogy of the patron saint of the day, Joseph, the husband of Mary, the "Mother of God." Fifteen minutes were occupied with the delivery of the sermon, which was evidently repeated from memory and with rapid utterance.

In closing, Father Prieto lowered his voice and spoke more evenly, and as if more sure of himself, to this effect:

"Therefore, beloved, you need have no doubts in your minds about the power of our blessed St. Joseph nor of his sentiments toward yourselves. The Fathers of the church do not hesitate to 'declare, following the sacred text, that our salvation is in his hands, because he, by his intercession, can accomplish what Mary can by privilege and Jesus by his own will.' Therefore, 'Go to Joseph.'"<sup>1</sup>

The priest fell upon his knees as he concluded, resting his forehead upon his folded arms, while the flowing sleeves of his black gown swept the railing of the pulpit. The murmuring crowd passed out into the sunshine and the church grew empty and still.

The *plaza* in front of the church was ablaze with light and color. The crimson, the purple, the scarlet, and the green of the flower beds, bordered by the silvery foliage of the "dusty miller" plants, dazzled the eye seeking the ground for relief from the sunlight, while the golden gleam of oranges in the midst of dusty leaves overhead, the bright blue sky above, and over all the glare of noonday, had an intolerable effect upon eyes adjusted to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 41 : 55. This application of Pharaoh's words to the starving Egyptians in search of corn was actually made, not long since, by a Roman Catholic writer in Spanish. (See Appendix I.)

dusky shadows of the interior of the church. The streams of men and women pouring through the iron gates were not long in dispersing themselves along the various narrow streets diverging from the *plaza*. North, east, south, and west they tripped or shuffled, in high-heeled shoes or flapping sandals, hugging the walls on the shady side of the street, and having very little to say to one another.

Two ladies sauntered more leisurely than the rest along the outer sidewalk bounding the *plaza*. Both wore scarfs of the finest black lace, draped gracefully over their heads and falling in soft folds about their shoulders. The elder's dress was of black silk, and in her black-gloved hands she carried an ivory-bound missal, while a costly rosary wrapped her wrist around and around. Her figure was tall and spare, and the dark eyes that gleamed from beneath the thick, black eyebrows had almost the fire of youth in them. Her hair, however, barely concealed by the mantilla, was iron-gray in hue, and was worn brushed back from her high forehead in crisp, wiry waves. The Señora Alejandra Barrera was a wealthy lady of Guadalajara, and to-day being the "saint's day" of her deceased husband, Don José, she had accompanied her granddaughter to mass.

During the sermon following, her eagle glance had fallen more than once upon the upraised features of the young girl seated in the chair at her



side. Now, as they strolled homeward together, the grandmother remarked in her full, deep tones:

"You heard more of the sermon of young Prieto than I did, Ninfa, if one might judge by your apparent interest in it."

Now Ninfa was as the apple of this stern lady's eye, and well she knew it. A saucy toss of her small, veiled head and a quick shrug of her shoulders was her sole reply to this remark.

The señora smiled grimly.

"Of what were you thinking while Justo delivered his sermon? A beautiful one, I am sure. Speak, Ninfa."

"Of how the birds used to sing in the beech tree above us, when Justo and I played at pottery-making," Ninfa replied promptly. "The old house at El Dorado was nicer than our big house here, *mamá*, and Justo was a good little playfellow, if he did call me 'woman' and 'stupid,' sometimes. Suppose he was the son of an Indian——"

"And you a daughter of the best blood of Spain," her grandmother interrupted harshly. "You are a wicked girl, Ninfa, and should know better than to let your mind wander back to forgotten and impossible days, while a good young man is striving to feed your soul. After that speech of yours I must again warn you to forget that Justo ever entered for one hour into our life at the *hacienda*. Priest though he is, he will always

be the son of your grandfather's servant. I do not think he will ever presume upon the acquaintance of former years. He has been out into the world, and will have learned that the Señorita Barreda and he can have nothing in common."

"Impossible days!" the girl had murmured to herself, during the first part of the lady's speech. At the end she retorted bravely: "Not even the memory of 'former years,' *mamá?* Ah," with a mischievous gleam in her brown eyes, "what a dear little brown face he had, and how he could sing! Not even the birds——"

"Silence," the señora commanded, in a low voice not to be disobeyed. They had reached the other end of the *plaza* now, and slipping her arm through Ninfa's, the grandmother stepped more briskly along first one narrow way, then another, toward Casa Barreda in the rear of the cathedral.

The city home of the Barredas was a gloomy stone building occupying a corner of the Calle del Seminario and the Calle de la Merced. Other houses joined their walls with those of Casa Barreda in the rear and on the left hand, while its front and right-hand side overlooked the above-named streets. Iron-barred windows lighted the ground floor, which was used for servants' offices, stables, and carriage house, while balconies jutted from the windows of the upper story.

When the owner of the house, with Ninfa, left

the street, they passed through a lofty pillared doorway, protruding presumptuously over the whole breadth of the sidewalk, and entered the grand square court beyond. This court was bounded on its four sides by the house itself, was paved with huge blocks of stone, and roofed by the blue canopy of the sky. A broad stone staircase led up from the court to the arched corridor above, from which all the upper rooms of the house were entered.

The sun stood above the court at this hour, and the stones of the pavement were flooded with a white light which made the shade of the lower corridor an agreeable exchange for thin shoe soles and aching eyes.

Ninfa did not take the trouble to skirt the court in search of shade, as her grandmother was doing, but, skimming across the sunlit space and running lightly up the stairs, was soon hidden behind the *portière* of her little white room.

The Señora Barreda paused in the lower corridor to speak with Pedro, the porter, about some household matter, and then passed majestically up the staircase. She likewise retired at once to her own room, instead of lingering in the pleasant corridor where easy-chairs and cushions invited repose.

Closing behind her the glass doors opening upon the corridor, the señora crossed the red-tiled floor and prostrated herself before a painting hung upon

the wall opposite the canopied bedstead. The picture represented Joseph, the husband of Mary, as an old man, gray of hair and beard, and wrinkled of feature. A blue blanket wrapped his shoulders, and he was girded at the waist by a leather strap. One hand grasped a staff, and the other held the end of a bit of cord, presumably the halter of the ass, bearing Mary and the young child out of harm's way into Egypt. But for the halo around the head, and the suggestive bit of rope, the half-length painting of St. Joseph might have been only the portrait of some old man. In the Señora Barrera's saint, indeed, the two ideas had been blended. St. Joseph's head and hands were from life, the head and hands of her husband, Don José, late owner of the *hacienda* of El Dorado, and of the house in Guadalajara.

Don José had been many years older than his stately Spanish wife, and more than once in the last years of his life, he had been taken for the señora's father. Alejandra had loved and revered him with her whole heart, in whose depths José was canonized with all the honors due the patron saint of the household.

As she knelt now before the picture, her eyes were raised adoringly toward the rugged face above her own. The lace scarf still hid the gray waves of her hair, and in the faint glow cast by the little lamp swinging below the picture her face seemed

to have gained something of its youthful beauty of tint and outline.

Her hands trembled as she mechanically passed her rosary beads through her nervous fingers. While her lips murmured a word of prayer to the saint, the thoughts of her heart were only of him who had been the real and tangible saint of her life, her husband José.

## II

MEANWHILE Ninfa had prostrated herself before a very different image, in the large oval mirror over her dressing table. The table was low and, with arms crossed upon its white cover and head thrown backward, the girl could see the pretty reflection of herself to her waist.

"Now I look just as I did in the church," she said to herself, with a little vain toss of her head and a twinkle in her brown eyes neutralizing the solemnity that strove to reign there. "I wonder if he recognized me in the midst of all the women and girls. I sat very stiff and straight and never for an instant took my eyes from him, but I wanted to laugh when I remembered the time I threw the lump of wet clay into his face. He called me worse names than ever after that, but I cared nothing for them then, because I had had my revenge, and I laughed at the mud on his nose."

One reminiscence easily led to another, and as long-continued kneeling always made Ninfa's limbs ache, whether she were occupied in the adoration of herself or of some other virgin saint, she soon slipped to a sitting posture on the floor.

A sad and puzzled expression succeeded the

merry one on her pretty, dimpled face. Memories of the old, young life at the *hacienda* of El Dorado, where they had lived until Don José's death two years before, always brought to her bitter thoughts mixed with the sweet. Justo, the peasant playmate of the broad brow and the cold heart, was forgotten more quickly than the grandmother could have believed possible, and the straight black eyebrows were knit and the corners of the childish mouth drooped over the never-ending wonder in the girl's mind.

She had thrown off her mantilla on forsaking the mirror, and the low coil of smooth black hair had become loosened and drooped about her ears.

Ninfa was seventeen years old and beautiful, small though she was, and dark. The merry light of her eyes, the warm color in her cheeks, and the regular delicacy of her features compensated for her lack of fairness. The señora, her grandmother, often sighed, even when her heart was overflowing with unuttered tenderness for her granddaughter, lamenting the fact that Ninfa was the very image of her mother, with not a hint of her noble father in form or face. The lady comforted herself, however, with the conviction that as the years passed swiftly onward, Ninfa was developing more and more of her father's easy lightness of disposition, with no taint of her mother's obstinate and serious nature.

In as few words as possible, the following shows

the reason why, in the señora's estimation, Ninfa was as blessed in her father as cursed in her mother; and all the while the daughter of the dead Vicente and Manuela sits disconsolate on the red-tiled floor of her room and tries to solve her puzzle.

Without troubling with the how and the why, the proud Spanish beauty, the Señorita Alejandra de la Palma, married the middle-aged *hacendado*, Don José Barrera of the Mexican State of Jalisco.

The rich farms, or *hacienda*, of El Dorado seemed to prosper as never before after the master's return from Mexico City with his young bride. The ancient mansion in the city was rejuvenated within and without, but while the husband lived, Alejandra's favorite place of residence had been the great *adobe* house at El Dorado. Here the only child and heir was born, Vicente, tall, straight, gray-eyed, fair, with hair of a chestnut brown.

The boy had been his mother's idol, as are many only sons, even in non-idolatrous countries. As he outgrew boyhood and became a man, he was sent on his travels through the Mexican cities, and once even as far as Cordova in Spain, the home of his mother's people. Vicente's own traveling coach rumbled in and out of the huge corral at El Dorado, according to the young master's will, while the parents waited patiently at home.

For shorter journeys to neighboring *haciendas*,



there was a horse always ready in the stables, awaiting Vicente's need. The cumbrous Spanish saddle, the brightly colored blanket-roll, the silver spurs and silver-mounted whip, the handsome riding costume of a Spanish cavalier, an adoring groom, and all the rest of the equipments of the young knight were at hand at a moment's notice.

One day when Vicente had been over the mountains, toward the coast, on a visit to the *hacienda* of Las Rosas, he returned with a strange mixture of love and dread in his heart. He was but twenty years old, yet he brought with him a wife, a black-eyed and determined-looking little woman of sixteen years. Manuelita rode her pony at her young husband's side in happy unconsciousness of the darkness she was to bring to the household at El Dorado. Never once during the rest of her short life did she pass from under that shadow cloud.

The señora, her mother-in-law, received her son's wife with gloomy brow and set lips. That her boy, the last of a long line of noble ancestors, should have expected her to receive into her heart a peasant girl of Mexico as his wife and her daughter, nearly divided her heart in two. But the marriage was already an accomplished fact. The ardent courtship of a few weeks, the willing consent of Manuelita's aging parents, the prompt offices of a bribed priest, had done what the señora of El Dorado could not undo.

Don José had not been so relentless as Doña Alejandra, when once the bitter pill had been swallowed, but he could do little to soften his wife's angry disappointment.

Perhaps all might yet have been well, if Vicente had lived to enjoy the twin daughters born in the old home a little more than a year after the marriage. The coming of the children would surely have lifted some of the trouble from Vicente's affectionate heart—for the mother had grown stern and forbidding even toward her beloved son—but the young father, barely a man in years, was suddenly killed on the day after the birth of the babies by a kick from a wild horse in the corral. It seemed for a time as if the young mother would not survive the terrible blow. With a little one on each side of her, jealously guarding them from the señora even in the midst of her delirium, she fought her way back to life and lived for the little Ninfa and Luz.<sup>1</sup>

By this time the household had grown accustomed to the "interloper," who had lost from her cheeks the roses brought from her father's ranch to El Dorado, though the fire still burned in her eyes. For her own sake she longed to return to the bare little home at Las Rosas, carrying nothing from the home of her husband's parents but dear memories of her Vicente and the two plump in-

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<sup>1</sup> Luz, pronounced always *Luce*, and meaning *light*.

fants. For the latters' sake, however, she kept her longings to herself and forced herself to remain at El Dorado. The grandmother was beginning to bear with her daughter-in-law's presence in the home for the sake of these same precious babies, and surely it would be for the good of the twins, as they should grow toward maidenhood, to be identified with their wealthy grandparents. So Manuela repressed her longings and her helpless rebellion and nursed her children till they grew to be lively, chubby little dears of one and a half years old.

If the Señora Barreda's daughter-in-law had been the aristocratic, languid lady of the city whom the señora might have chosen for their son's wife, she would not have been allowed to take the entire charge of the two restless children. As it was, no peasant nurse could have been more able to provide all needful care for them than was the little mother herself, and it is useless to say that Manuela would have resented another's usurping her motherly place.

When Luz and Ninfa were about eighteen months old, news reached Manuela from Las Rosas that her mother was dying and her father in sore need of his daughter's help and comfort. There was great indignation, however, at El Dorado when Manuela, in some trepidation, yet with a firm set of her square little chin, announced to her mother-

in-law that she with the babies would set out for Las Rosas on the very next day.

"Impossible!" said Alejandra decidedly. "Go yourself, of course, but the children will stay with me."

"I cannot leave my babies behind," Manuela returned, bracing herself for a struggle with her mother-in-law's will. "Little Luz is not well and cannot get the rest of her teeth without me."

"My son's children are my children as well as yours, Manuela," the other retorted, "and I have the right to forbid your taking the babies on so long a ride across the mountains. How will you manage them on horseback, and how," growing excited as the thought occurred to her mind, "do I know that you will ever bring them back to me?"

"Now, wife, do not be angry with Manuela," Don José had interposed in his kind way. "She has a right to wish to go to her mother, who is dying, and naturally she wishes to carry the *niñas*.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps, however, she will agree to leave one with us. Little Ninfa is strong and hearty and already drinks her jar of goat's milk like a woman. She might stay with you while the other goes with the mother."

The kindly old man was not without his cunning intention in this proposal, as Manuela easily divined.

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<sup>1</sup> Girls.

Yet she was grateful to him for the interposition, realizing the bitterness of the conflict which would have continued between the elder lady and herself if she had insisted upon carrying off both little ones.

So it was arranged that Luz should go and Ninfa remain behind, and the compromise was not effected without some secret satisfaction on both sides. Each disputant attempted self-consolation in her own way.

"Ninfa will be a little hostage for the return of her sister," Doña Alejandra thought to herself when all was settled. "Manuela will never return without Luz, and she will just as certainly not remain away from Ninfa longer than necessary. So I shall have both my children again."

"If I cannot have both, I shall at least carry my husband's face with me," Manuela cried softly at bedtime, bending over the little fair head of Luz. "I could never have left my Luz, and yet I love Ninfa just as well. May the Holy Mother watch over my little innocent," she prayed, kissing the curls on the dark head lying close beside the other.

Across the plains and over the mountains, down toward the sea in the west, the mother and child traveled, escorted by the faithful peasant who had brought the news of her mother's illness.

They never returned to El Dorado, for in one week from the arrival at Las Rosas, Luz and Ninfa

were motherless. The fever was waiting for Manuela at Las Rosas, and she succumbed after a few days' struggle. This was before the thought of a railroad from the east to the west, and many weeks passed before news of the little mother's death reached El Dorado.

Later inquiries brought to light the fact that Manuela's mother had died before her daughter reached home, not of the fever, but of heart-rheumatism. The father had fallen a victim to the fever which carried off his daughter, and the baby also had sickened. Such had been the horror of the scourge in the ranch village that the fate of one baby more or less had not seemed to make the impression upon the poverty-stricken villagers that the Señora Barreda thought it ought to have made, when that one was the baby about which she cared, the daughter of her only son.

The señora herself had gone to inquire into the reality of the facts that had been reported to her concerning Manuela's end, and she would not be satisfied with the old *padre's* first communication. He it was who had been bribed to marry this lady's son to the humble Manuelita, and he was afraid to speak all the truth for fear of incurring further angry flashes from those haughty, black eyes.

At last he was forced to admit that the little grave to which he had led Doña Alejandra might not contain the body of Luz Barreda, after all. A

little later, disarmed by the great lady's real distress, he confided to her that Manuela's baby, more dead than alive, had been taken possession of by a party of fugitives who were about to depart for the north of Mexico. One woman, whose own child had died of the fever, had wrapped little Luz in her *rebozo* and had hurried off on foot to join the rest, who were literally shaking off the dust of the village from their sandaled feet and speeding away.

The woman's name was Teresa Flores and a good woman she was, if desperately poor, and the *padre* had been glad to see the poor little creature in motherly arms once more. He had not opposed the "abduction"; no, no, why should he have done so? The child would have been dead before another night had fallen, was most likely dead now, but at least it had died in a woman's arms and not upon the damp earth floor of a fever hut.

Since that day nothing more had been heard of the woman who had carried off one of the little heiresses of the Barreda estate, though every effort possible at that time was made. With no railroads, no telegraph, no detective system, there was little hope of accomplishing anything in the way of a search. Many parties had left the village during the fever scourge. Many women had lost children, and many had taken their neighbors' little ones, left orphans and alone.

Manuela's name was never spoken in the El

Dorado home, after the first few weeks of suspense regarding the fate of Luz, and Ninfa knew little of her mother and sister beyond the fact that they had perished in a scourge of fever while visiting the mother's friends in a distant region "beyond the mountains."

The puzzle of the girl's maturer years had resolved itself into this question: "Why do I hear so much of the beauty and accomplishments of my father and never a word of my mother, my own mother, who was different from my grandmother, whom I call *mamá*? Why did my mother leave me and take Luz on that dreadful visit? And why will *mamá* never answer my questions about them?"



### III

THE rest of that nineteenth day of March passed slowly in the quiet home of the Barredas. In former times, on this her husband's birthday as well as "saint's day," the señora would have had the house filled with guests and music and all good Mexican cheer in honor of its master. Since his death two quiet anniversaries of the feast day of San José had passed, varying from other days only in the longer staying at church in the forenoon, and in the private devotions of the afternoon.

Of course the Señora Barrera was a Romanist. There was every reason why she should be such, and no reason why she should have been anything else. She was hardly aware of the existence of the two or three small Protestant gatherings held in obscure rooms in the city. That one of these rather mysterious bodies had a temporary abiding-place in the very street in which she lived was known to her, it is true, yet it was a matter of such small concern that it never for a moment occupied her thoughts. Her confidence in the Holy Virgin, the saints, and in Mary's Son, was fixed and consoling. Most of the afternoon of this day of St. Joseph was spent in her own room, in a low chair

drawn close before her saint's picture. Through the long, bright hours she sat, holding in her hand a very small parchment-covered book, yellowed with age and worn with use.

Poor Ninfa always dreaded these afternoons, which fortunately for her came but once a year. They were even worse than the anniversaries of her grandfather's death, for on those occasions, besides the attendance upon special mass for the departed soul, there was always the afternoon drive to Belen, the city cemetery, where Don José was interred. There were wreaths of fresh flowers to be added to those of black and white beads, perpetually adorning the cherished tomb. Moreover, the dust was to be carefully brushed, with tear-wetted handkerchief, from the little crucifix of wood, suspended upon the marble tablet marking Don José's resting-place. Naturally, these expeditions afforded more of subdued enjoyment to the granddaughter than to the widow, for variety of any kind was welcomed by Ninfa, in her quiet life.

Now while the señora sat reading and musing over her little yellowed volume, Ninfa was lolling in a bored fashion on the lounge in the corridor, talking idly to the great, green parrot in his cage, close at hand, or gazing vacantly past the scalloped edges of the awning into the square of blue sky roofing the court. The servants were out for their holiday-making, all except Pedro, who was drowsing

on the stone bench in the hallway below, and all the house was quiet.

On other afternoons there was her lovely drawn-work on linen to occupy and amuse her, but on this day there must be no work, only tiresome idleness, and the work frame stood in its corner of the corridor, covered with a clean cloth to keep the dust from the linen. On looking beneath that cloth, one would have seen stretched upon the light frame, on its four slender legs, a filmy, cobwebby design in the drawn and worked threads of a bit of linen, that would have made one's eyes ache, not to speak of the envious heart, fain to possess the dainty square.

Ninfa's young eyes were not conscious of needing the rest accorded by St. Joseph, and she rebelled at the delay in completing her task. The linen square was intended to be an offering for the high altar of the church of San José, a very unworthy bit of handiwork, from her unworthy little hands, upon which the holy pyx<sup>1</sup> was to rest.

Thinking of her work, which should have been finished long ago, to grace the altar on this, her grandfather's feast day, she was reminded of the wondrous body of the Lord, so miraculously enclosed in the golden pyx, and so jealously guarded from insult and from waste. Her eyes grew large and won-

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<sup>1</sup> A costly box, usually made cross-shaped, containing the wafer or "host" of the Roman Catholic Church.

dering, as she lay looking up into the empty space beyond the roof, remembering a tale once told to her by the woman who had nursed her day and night after her mother had gone away to Las Rosas.

The tale of old Guadalupe ran thus: A great sinner died, steeped in guilt. He had received the sacraments, yet unworthily, and for this his soul had gone down to hell to keep company with many others who had confessed and communed, receiving holy unction, yet all unworthily, and who for this were still in that abode of misery. The holy angels came and took from the sinner the sacred host which he still retained in his mouth, and bore it away to the cell of a saintly recluse, who was in her accustomed attitude of prayer. By and by a nun entered the cell and found the servant of God unconscious, in a profound trance, and before her a beautiful little ark containing the small bit of the host. When the virtuous recluse came to herself, the nun asked her why she had brought the most holy sacrament to her cell. "The angels took it," she replied, "from the mouth of a bad man, who had received it with an evil heart, whose soul yet remains in hell. His Divine Majesty wishes me to receive this host and so rescue a soul from purgatory."

In her darkened chamber meanwhile the señora meditated upon such consoling exercises and prayers as the following, from the little book:

To those who are careful about being diligent to gain indulgences I recommend two things. One, that from now on they be more careful. The other, that they try to dedicate themselves to the holy souls in purgatory. Pity their necessity, which is extreme, for they can do nothing to help themselves. Give alms for them, which is most acceptable to God. Thou wilt say: "I have no money." I say to thee: "Hast thou a rosary?" Thou wilt reply: "Yes." Then take it in thy hands, and if thou dost use it entire, thou wilt minister to all the necessities of one of those souls. If thou prayest only a part, thou canst thereby relieve one or many needs, and perhaps release them from purgatory. . . Perhaps the husband, the wife, the father, the mother, the friend is in purgatory, and from their torments beseech spiritual alms. . . The least pain of purgatory is more frightful than the greatest torments of this world, if we may believe St. Augustine and St. Thomas. Pity, therefore, those who are there. Take thy rosary and pray often. . . Do not be so sure that thou wilt go from thy bed straight to heaven; because I can tell thee that of the many souls St. Theresa saw leave this world in grace, but three went to glory without going first to purgatory. Know, then, what will happen to thee if thou goest to purgatory. What? Listen: "With the measure with which thou metest to others, it shall be measured to thee," says Christ, our Lord. And it is as if he had said, As thou doest for thy neighbors, so will others do for thee. Forget them, do not aid them; those who remain here will so do with thee. Commend them to God,

pray with the rosary, using mercy for those in purgatory ; those who survive thee will do the same for thee. . . It is well so to act, because the most holy Virgin is of assistance in the terrible hour and last struggle of death. . . The venerable Sor Maria de Jesus . . . was most devoted to the holy rosary. She found herself in the agonies of death, and with tears, cried : "Where art thou, Lady, my mother? Where art thou? Seven times each day have I told my rosary, and now thou leavest me, having promised me thy assistance in my death. Señora, I can do no more." She crossed her hands upon her breast, and fell. The nuns around her thought that she had fainted from her importunities, but it was not so. She had entered into a trance.

In it she saw the heavenly Queen with her divine Son in her arms. The boy had a golden rosary in one hand, and in the other a lily. The most holy Virgin said : "My Son, this soul has been so devoted to my rosary, have some pity upon her." He replied : "Keep the lily for me, my mother, while I put this rosary around my spouse's neck."

Then the boy said to the sick woman : "Thou art called Maria de Jesus ; I am called Jesus de Maria. Take this rosary, but it must encircle thy throat as well as mine."

They embraced, and the divine mother hung the rosary about their necks, causing in the soul of the Sor Maria the joy that may be well understood.

She came to herself, and with great joy said : "My sisters, God be with you ; I have obtained my desire. Devote yourselves to the holy rosary and in heaven we shall see each other again."

Then she died, and in the embrace of her loved One ascended to heaven.

From time to time the afflicted lady dropped upon her knees, and "telling her beads," earnestly offered prayer, as set down in the little book devoted to the Madonna of the Rosary. Toward the last came this prayer :

Mother of God, and most disconsolate Virgin, humbly I offer this part of the rosary of mysterious grief; I beseech thee to gain from the Son, through his passion and death, the exaltation of the Catholic faith, the conversion of the unbelieving and of sinners, peace among Christians, aid for the souls in purgatory, sorrow for sin, and confession, in order that the fruit of the passion and death of thy Son may avail. Amen.

When the señora and Ninfa met at dinner at eight o'clock that evening, there was a shade of exhaustion over the grandmother's high-bred face, but she was carefully and elegantly dressed, as was her invariable habit for dinner. The substantial meal over, they left the dining room and went together along the dimly-lighted corridor to the *sala*, or drawing room.

This room was long and lofty, having great windows opening from ceiling to floor and leading out upon iron balconies. The floor was paved with large, shining tiles, square in shape, and colored a deep red. There were costly rugs laid over the

tiles, and rich curtains of lace and damask draped the windows. Rows of chairs were ranged against the walls up and down the room ; at one end a sofa, the seat of honor, covered with crimson velvet, was flanked by two large armchairs to match. These chairs faced each other, and little velvet footstools rested invitingly in front of each, on the soft rug. At the other end of the room an inlaid table of fine woods, with slender, bulging legs, supported a statuette of alabaster, representing "Our Lady of the Rosary" bearing the child Jesus in her arms. The table, chair backs, and sofa cushions were covered with linen squares and oblongs, ornamented with intricate drawn-work and embroidery. The walls, frescoed in cream color and chocolate tints, were hung with quaint old paintings, with here and there an odd little discolored engraving of some Spanish town or Moorish castle.

It was a cool and pleasant room on a warm and windy night in March. A few candles burned on their brackets above the sofa at one end of the room, while a tall lamp with its ground-glass shade stood beside the image on the table at the other end and threw a soft, white light over the marble faces. From the streets below the busy evening bustle seemed only a pleasing murmur as it penetrated the partly opened casements of the windows. An occasional rattle of wheels was the loudest of the sounds that entered the *sala*, but there was a



continual soft shuffle of sandals over the cobblestones, for the whole sandaled world seemed to be abroad. Now and then the piercing voice of a woman shouted her wares in the prolonged, tune ful cry :

“*Helotes calientes!*”<sup>1</sup>

Or, the *dulce* man extolled the toothsome ness of his dainties, sugared and crisp with nuts. The moon sailed quietly overhead, and the tiled dome of the cathedral raised itself whitely from the dark mass of the rest of the building.

Ninfa dropped upon a footstool at her grandmother’s feet and rested her head against her knee. The girl’s spirits, usually gay and irrepressible, had been more than usually depressed by the long and lonely afternoon hours, following upon the unusual excitement of the morning. She heaved a great sigh, and then, raising her head, looked into her grandmother’s face and laughed.

“I feel like a little, little girl to-night, *mamá mia* ; please tell me a story.”

The señora smoothed the pretty, dark hair from Ninfa’s forehead and gently touched her rounded cheeks and small ears, smiling faintly as she did so.

“What shall I tell you, little one?” was the reply.

A bold thought struck Ninfa. The grandmother’s mood was tender to-night. She had just dined

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<sup>1</sup> Hot corn !

particularly well, after the fasting and the meditations of the day. The whole world, besides themselves, was abroad in the gay *plazas*, so that there would be no interruptions possible. She would ask for the story of—well, at least of her *hermanita*, the little sister, Luz, whom she had been missing all the afternoon in her heart.

“*Mamá*, tell me about my *hermanita*. There is no story I would so much like to hear.”

Before she spoke, Ninfa knew just how the cloud would come and darken her grandmother's face at the mention of the little sister's name. But she had been very careful not to speak of her mother, having learned that the señora would never open her lips when questioned upon this subject. Long ago and many times Ninfa had heard how the baby Luz had been the exact image of her tall, beautiful *papá*, who was little more than a boy when he was killed; how prettily the little one and she herself had played together for eighteen short months; and how all had ended so suddenly. To-night she hoped to hear more than this. Her hope was not fulfilled.

The cloud came, the eyes looking into her own narrowed and darkened, the hands caressing her head were withdrawn, and the Señora Barreda sat stiffly upright in the arm-chair with her face set toward the statue standing in the white light across the room. After a moment's silence, the lady

cleared her throat and again bent over Ninfa, who had slightly drawn away from the maternal knee and now sat listless and silent.

"Certainly I will tell you a story, my soul," the grandmother said cheerily, dismissing the cloud by an effort. "I will tell you how the Christ blessed the olive tree."

There was no allusion made to Ninfa's particular request and the young girl did not dare to press her point. With another sigh she yielded, as all past time had taught her to yield, to her grandmother's will, and restoring her elbow to its former place, she listened for the first words to fall from the lips which for sixteen long years had readily shaped themselves to story-telling for Ninfa's sake.

But Ninfa was not to learn on this evening how the olive tree was blessed. A brisk knock on the street door below roused old Pedro from his early slumbers on the bench and arrested the words on the señora's lips. Nothing more was heard for a few seconds, while those in the drawing room listened for what was to follow. Evening visitors were no rarity, except on this evening of the year when Pedro for two years past, according to orders, had denied his mistress to all callers. Something told the elder lady that this visitor would not be denied, even by Pedro, and the tinkle of the bell at the iron gate of the upper corridor soon confirmed

her suspicion. A servant hurried to the gate, unlocked it, and admitted a man wearing the broad hat and black gown of a priest.

"The señora is in the *sala*, señor," Guadalupe said respectfully.

#### IV

THE cook had retired on admitting the priest, considering her duty done, and Don Justo was left to find the way for himself under the arches of the corridor to the door of the drawing room. But he seemed to have no difficulty in doing so, and his quick steps echoed firmly over the tiles, pausing for an instant as he hung his hat upon one of the branching stag antlers suspended beneath the corridor lamp. When he presented himself at the open door he was met by the Señora Barreda's commanding figure, drawn to its full height, and extending a gracious hand of welcome.

"I knew your step, you see, Justo," she said pleasantly. "Come in, and tell me about your travels. Yes, this is the little Ninfa; you remember my baby granddaughter? Ninfa, can you have forgotten the *corral* overseer of your grandfather? This is his son, whom I have educated in Madrid. He is a full-ordered priest now. Is it not so, Justo *mio*?"

The priest bowed gravely as he touched for a moment the small brown hand extended to him from behind the grandmother. He had kissed the strong hand of his patroness. This other little hand

was not to be kissed, of course. A merry twinkle shone in Ninfa's eyes as she raised them for a moment to sweep her old playmate's countenance. Gleam answered gleam, and Ninfa turned away to hide her smiling lips as the señora motioned Justo to a seat in the velvet chair opposite her own.

His face had not departed from its pale gravity and the gleam of his eye had been but as a lightning flash, unseen by the señora as she had turned to reseal herself. Instead of accepting the lady's invitation, Justo crossed to the side of the room and lifting one of the cane-seated chairs standing primly against the walls, returned with it to the señora's neighborhood, and placing it just beyond the edge of the flowered rug, sat down upon it and waited for her to speak again. In the moment of silence that followed this action of the priest, the three persons present were thinking very busily.

"Proud!" thought the lady of the house. "A good sign. My training is working well. As a priest and preacher he would always have been welcomed at my house. As such he might have occupied the sofa or reception chair. He chooses to come in the shape of an acquaintance of the old days, and he does well to act in accordance with his true position as pensioner of mine. Let him abide by his choice."

"As cold and proud as ever," was another thought flashed across the moment of stillness.





"In any other garb than that of priest —."

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"I will not offend her who has made me what I am. But why should she fear for Ninfa? A baby indeed! I can forget, if the señora wishes me to do so. Yet, what is there to be forgotten? I am not a man to remember girls' eyes. I should like to tell the señora that she need not fear to speak of me to Ninfa as the old playmate of the little one's childhood. I am a priest and besides——"

"It has not changed at all, the funny, ugly face!" thought Ninfa, as she slipped past the red window hangings and stepped out upon the balcony behind her grandmother's chair. "But why is he losing all his front hair? and what a great square chin he has! If he had not been a priest he would have been married long ago, I suppose. Poor fellow, I am sorry he cannot marry, because he might have found somebody to love his long, pale face, who would never have thrown mud at his eyes."

Now, Justo Prieto was not an ugly man, though Ninfa in her heart-wholeness and girlish fancifulness could see nothing to admire in her old friend. Perhaps in any other garb than that of a priest, Justo would have been "ugly," but the long, severe gown, with its broad sash and short shoulder cape, was well suited to his erect figure, and the severe simplicity of the white collar below the square chin gave just the relief needed by his face.

He sat with his full brow and earnest eyes turned toward the señora, and he listened to her remarks

and answered her questions with respectful attention. Scarcely a thought of his followed the exit of the little lady who had disappeared behind the window curtain, for the priest had been honest in his reflections on meeting his hostess, and was in no danger of considering Ninfa in any more interesting light than that shed by the memory of boyhood's days.

Meanwhile, Ninfa soon forgot Don Justo in her absorption in the scene in the street below. She had worn a long scarf of pink and white gauze around her shoulders while sitting inside, and now, with the night air about her, she wrapped it around her head and neck. Her evening dress of thin black lawn was close about her throat, but the puffed sleeves left her arms bare from the elbows. Soft and dimpled arms they were, although not so white as the little sister's would have been, for Luz was a *huerita*, a little blonde girl, with fair skin and gray-blue eyes. But the rich, warm blood in Ninfa's veins glowed through the tinted skin of arm and cheek, until there was not the slightest tinge of sallowness in their clear olive. Her French-heeled slipper of bronze kid tapped rhythmically upon the stone slab of the balcony floor, and she hummed the air played at that moment by the band in the Plaza de Armas, one block away.

Throngs of passers-by still filled the street, electric lights blazed here and there, and the night

seemed very gay to the secluded little girl high up above it all. The sidewalks on both sides of the way were almost deserted for the middle of the street, because of the encroachments of the towering cathedral walls on one hand, and the jutting portico of the Barreda residence on the other. There lay a deep shadow in the angle formed by the portico and the house wall, below Ninfa's balcony, and as the girl paused in her low, sweet humming of the music, she heard a slight stir there below, as of a foot softly scraped over the stones, followed by a smothered cough. She glanced downward in the direction from which the sounds seemed to come, and her eyes became aware of the dim outline of a man's figure, with face upturned toward the balcony. A little startled, Ninfa laid her hand over her quickened heart and stepped back from the railing. An instant afterward, however, she resumed her former attitude of leaning over the railing and, as if carelessly, glanced again into the street.

The dark corner was no longer occupied, but across the street she saw a stationary figure, which had certainly not been there a moment before, leaning carelessly against the blank church wall. The young man had quickly crossed the narrow street as she had disappeared for that shrinking instant, and now as she again leaned out into the night, he recrossed and stood directly beneath the

balcony, with his head thrown back against the stone pillar of the portico. Passers-by might have thought him a student of the stars, showing faintly under the light of the moon, but the stars studied by young Anselmo Cárdenas were those shining from Ninfa's eyes, and such coquettish and elusive stars were these that, after sweeping down upon him one more bright ray, they speedily retired from view and left him in a starless night alone.

For Ninfa, though young, was a discreet damsel, and knew that little Mexican girls must be careful of their bright eyes when grandmothers are not at hand to spread grandmotherly wings and cluck alarm.

She returned to the drawing room from the balcony, leaving Anselmo Cárdenas searching in vain for one more glimpse of the eyes that had already dazzled his own more than once in *plaza* and church, although to-night was the first occasion upon which he had been so bold as to attract them to himself.

The priest had already risen to depart when the window curtains parted, admitting Ninfa. Though his visit had been short, it had been long enough to convince his hostess of two things: first, that the young Justo of to-day fully justified the estimate she had made of him six years before, and that the cool, keen intellect of the man was only the natural development of the boy's quiet intel-

ligence, which had attracted her from his earliest years ; second, that she need have no apprehensions concerning a renewal of intimacy between Ninfa and himself.

The man before her seemed wholly devoted to his calling, and if his morning's sermon might have shown to more learned critics than the señora his almost pitiful ignorance of the chronology of biblical history, his talk to-night upon other literary subjects, of Spanish literature, of the Latin classics, and of modern French, quite satisfied his hearer and would have done credit to many an older man. He had evidently made the most of his time while a student, and he meant to continue his studies, even after becoming pastor of the parish church at El Dorado. As he rose to leave, he was telling Alejandra of the bishop's desire that he should remain for some weeks in Guadalajara before burying himself in the small parish of his choice, and the señora was surprised to feel that this intelligence was unexpectedly welcome to her. It would be a comfort, after all, to have this self-contained young fellow to rely upon, for there were many points about the *hacienda* just now concerning which she needed the wide-awake advice of some one devoted to her interests, as this young man undoubtedly ought to be.

Therefore, mutual satisfaction was impressed upon both faces as Ninfa stepped toward them.

The introduction of her fervid beauty put to rout all sober calculations at once. The encounter of bright eyes outside had acted upon her brain as a sip of strong wine would have done, and she did not now hide behind her grandmother when for the second time her hand was outstretched to meet Justo's in farewell.

"Are you going away so soon, Don Justo?" she asked, her pleased excitement vibrating in her voice. "We have not had a moment to talk of the good old days when we worked at the clay figures; do you remember? *Mamá* says that those were 'impossible days' and not to be remembered," she went on recklessly; "but how can one forget them on seeing you again?"

The señora stood speechless at this daring disobedience of her granddaughter; but Justo regarded Ninfa's vehemence in something of its true light, that of a spoiled child, having, in even his shrewd brain, no idea of the occasion of the "child's" sudden cordiality. He looked kindly and gravely into her flushed face and dropped the little hand which she had offered him.

"Good-night, Señorita Ninfa," he said. "As your grandmother has said, those days are past for you and for me. For me, because I am a man and must think only of my work. For you, because you are no longer a little girl with idle fingers good only for daubing in the mud."

"And as you are a priest, you think you must preach me a sermon," Ninfa retorted with a saucy laugh. "I see you have not yet forgiven me, señor priest; but you know I never would have thrown the clay into your face if you had not called me 'stupid.' "

Justo flushed and turned impatiently from Ninfa to bid the señora good-night. He was to go on the next day to El Dorado for a week's visit only, and the señora had several messages for him to deliver at the *hacienda*. No more notice was taken of Ninfa, who speedily subsided from her high spirits in some dread of the consequences of her bold speeches.

"*Adios, Justo. Que vaya con Dios,*"<sup>1</sup> had scarcely left her grandmother's lips before that lady turned wearily to Ninfa and bade her go instantly to bed.

The front door below slammed behind the departing priest as the señora herself put out the candles, after closing the open windows of the *sala*.

"The child is naughty and willful beyond belief," she said to herself, as she paced the corridor outside, before entering her own bedroom next to Ninfa's. "She needs the companionship of other girls older and steadier than herself. But whom shall I seek as intimates for my darling? If Luz had lived! Already as a baby she was different from my little rattlebrain here, and her eyes were

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<sup>1</sup> "Farewell, Justo. Go with God."

her father's eyes, although she was such a steady little creature, never in mischief, never in a tantrum, never disobedient. Well, well, the will of God be done. I can say nothing. Long ago I exhausted all words. She is with God now and the saints, bless her ! For how could such a child have lived to grow up with an unknown peasant woman for a mother and a hovel for a home ? ”

Yet had Ninfa's mother, as well as her little sister's, been other than “an unknown peasant woman” ? and had not the babies been as sweet and wholesome little ones as one could desire or imagine ?

The señora did not stop to ask herself this question, much less to answer it, for such thoughts as the above usually drove her to her saint ; and following the priest's advice of the morning, she again went to Joseph to seek much-needed but oft-denied consolation.



## V

**D**URING the days that followed St. Joseph's feast day, Ninfa's fingers were busy with her drawn-work, and her thoughts were occupied by many new and tender imaginings. For hours she sat in the corridor, weaving the fine thread in and out of the open spaces in the delicate linen, while in her brain was woven a maidenly romance of many a witching tint. At last the work was done and dispatched by Maria, the housemaid, to Padre Manuel, who should see that it found its rightful place upon the high altar of San José.

On the Sunday following the completion of the work, Ninfa begged that she might attend mass at San José, with Guadalupe, instead of accompanying her grandmother to the cathedral service, as was her custom.

That the girl should wish to see the dainty corners of her linen square spread upon the velvet-covered support of the pyx on the altar was a reason good enough to win the good lady's willing consent to Ninfa's request. Guadalupe was a staid and most respectable woman, and would take good care of the pretty creature entrusted to her.

Now "playing the bear" was a game well enough

known to the Señora Barreda, but she had little idea that her granddaughter, at the tender age of seventeen, was already beginning to take part in such a game. Anselmo Cárdenas, having been encouraged by Ninfa's second look over the balcony railing, had not hesitated to "play the bear" in true Mexican fashion, on each succeeding evening thereafter. Not one word had passed between the two young things, however, and the playing at love, if love it could be called, had been confined to an interchange between balcony and street of soft glances and demure smiles, under the shadow of the night's friendly wing. It had been easy for Ninfa to find an excuse to step outside of the *sala* for a few moments, just after the palace and cathedral bells had chimed nine o'clock each night, and as yet Anselmo had never failed to perform his part of standing in the shadow below at the same hour.

On the Saturday evening before this Sunday, Ninfa had returned to her grandmother's side from the balcony with the color a little paled in her cheeks and with many an extra heart beat. The first words had passed an instant before, between her lover and herself.

"To-morrow morning, at San José?" had risen softly to her ear, bent low over the railing.

"Yes," had fluttered downward from her own trembling lips in reply.

Guadalupe chatted sociably as they hurried along the streets, in the bright morning sunshine. March was going out like a veritable lion of tawny hue and vehement strength. At certain street crossings it was next to impossible to continue one's steps until some huge, stalking whirlwind had hurried by. Opaque clouds of sand rushed up one street and down another, pelting faces and blinding eyes with the stinging particles of grit. The blue sky was overcast, and the streets were filled with a sickly, yellow light as one of these storm-gusts passed over the *plaza* of San José.

Guadalupe and Ninfa were glad to take refuge inside of the church at last, and both were soon on their knees near the altar rail. Ninfa was not too busy with her rosary of pearls to keep a corner of one eye wide open to all new-comers in her neighborhood. And she was quite satisfied, by and by, with the sight of Anselmo, kneeling upon his white handkerchief, spread on the floor, a few feet removed from her. Mass proceeded and ended, and Guadalupe led her charge away, without a suspicion that Ninfa had seen an acquaintance among the worshipers. Perhaps Ninfa herself would have been uncertain of the identity of this devout young man in plain black clothes with the shadowy presence that had haunted the portico, if Anselmo, by an infinitesimal lifting of the eyebrows, had not apprised her of his recognition of herself.

Some friend claimed the young man upon the church steps, so he was not allowed to follow Ninfa and her companion homeward, as had been his intention. Ninfa walked at Guadalupe's side as on wings. Her innocent heart was all aglow with pride and flattered vanity. Guadalupe was perhaps intent upon kitchen affairs, for she spoke not a word, and gave Ninfa time for collecting her wits before reaching home. When they had arrived within two squares of the house, Ninfa stopped suddenly. "Ah, Lupe *mia*, only see the dust coming toward us. Already my black scarf is turned an ugly gray with the miserable sand, and my mouth and eyes are full. You may go on, but I shall stop here and wait for the storm to pass."

Guadalupe shook her head; the vegetables would be spoiled, the broth for lunch would all boil away, already she was late. The señorita might stop for a moment, as there was a convenient doorway at hand, and they were so near home, but she herself must hasten, if the dust buried her a foot deep. Ninfa laughed and pushed the woman onward by the shoulders, as she herself stepped aside and into a friendly open doorway.

On came the whirlwind. The sunlight disappeared; the dust-cloud filled all the street, mounting high above the housetops. Stray hats flew along at its feet, and hoarse cries sounded in the yellow gloom.

Ninfa gave another little laugh of pleasure at her escape, then stopped short in open-eyed surprise. What had seemed an empty hallway from the sidewalk, now resolved itself into a dimly-lighted room, containing benches and a chair. Shawled women of the poorest class filled the benches and were faced by a fair-haired little woman in the chair whom Ninfa recognized instantly as a foreigner.

The girl shuddered. Could it be that she had entered the preaching place of the Americans who, mingling with the lowest and poorest of the inhabitants, abuse the Holy Catholic Church, and who teach that the blessed Virgin Mary was not the mother of the Lord Christ? Perhaps these people would seize her and force her to listen to their "doctrine"! She was timid; what might she not be induced to promise them in order to escape from this danger?

The murmur of voices in the room ceased for a moment, as Ninfa stared wildly around, too startled to think of running out into the street and so saving herself. The lady in the chair turned her head toward the little black-robed figure near the doorway and smiled.

"Come in out of the dust, señorita," she said pleasantly. "We shall be glad for you to wait here until it passes."

Ninfa yielded to the influence of the quiet voice and no longer trembled. All of the women but

one or two were clean and neatly dressed, and all looked friendly enough. From behind a canvas-covered door came the sound of men's voices, as if in earnest conversation.

"Will you not sit down for a moment?" the strange lady continued. "You seem quite out of breath, and no wonder, on such a day as this. We have been talking about an interesting subject, my scholars and I, and had almost forgotten the dust and heat outside."

"Are you a teacher?" Ninfa asked shyly, still standing, yet taking a step nearer the empty bench in front of the teacher's chair.

The lady laughed softly, and the women all smiled. "You think me very small for a teacher, no doubt," the former answered; "and it is true that I am learning as much from my class as they are learning from me."

"No, no, señora!" came from several of the women, while all shook their heads at such heresy.

"We have just come to a difficult point in our reading," the teacher continued, "and we had stopped to talk about it when you came in, señorita. Will you stay and listen?"

"Oh no, I cannot, I dare not!" Ninfa whispered, looking fearfully over her shoulder.

How should she ever dare to leave that doorway in the broad light of the sun? and yet she must not linger.

If only another sand storm would approach, so that she might slip out with no sharp eyes outside to detect her exit !

"Oh, I am sorry," the lady said, rising from her chair. "Perhaps, though, you will come again, when there is no hurry about getting away. Besides, dear child," she added in a whisper, going very near to Ninfa's side, "there can no harm come to you here. I love girls, and wish to help them always. Do not forget that, and that I am always here on Sunday mornings, just as you see me now."

Ninfa could not resist the sweetness of the little teacher's voice, nor her gentle dignity of manner.

"Perhaps some day I will come again," she replied in hesitating, yet almost wistful, tones.

"Now take this little card away with you," the teacher said, offering one from her book as she spoke. "It has the words of this morning's text on it, and I would like you to read them many times. Will you, for my sake?" she urged.

As it would have been the extreme of discourtesy to refuse, Ninfa readily gave the desired promise.

"Besides," the lady continued, "these words are true words. Many sayings of this world are not true sayings ; but this is the truth, because it is not a saying of the world, but of one of God's chosen apostles." Then with a friendly nod and a tender *adios*, Ninfa was allowed to go with the white card tucked away in the bosom of her lawn frock.

It did not take long to reach her grandmother's house, but this Sunday morning's outing was not to close without one more adventure for Ninfa. A walk of two squares unaccompanied by a chaperon was an unusual occurrence in her life, and she was about to enter the portico in great haste, when she was startled by the sudden gleam of something white, deftly tossed upon a ledge of one of the outer pillars. At the same moment a young man stepped past her, as if from the further side of the pillar, and lifting his high silk hat passed on up the street. With an instinct born of quickened heartbeats and low-drawn sighs, Ninfa laid her hand upon the bit of white paper, within easy reach, and then ran quickly past Pedro, sound asleep at this hour, and up the stairs to her room.

Here her grandmother found her, ten minutes later, when the call to lunch had sounded in vain through the house. The señora had chosen to seek her granddaughter for herself and had refused Maria's aid. She had entered noiselessly, and stood behind Ninfa's chair before the child realized her presence.

"And who is he who dares tell my granddaughter that he loves her, and to ask if his love is returned?" were the stern words that first startled Ninfa from her reverie.

There lay the small sheet of white, perfumed paper on the table, in full sight, not only of Ninfa's



adoring eyes, but also of the grandmother's, which could not have been thought to seem adoring of anybody or anything at that moment. The words written in a round, school-boyish hand were plain enough to read :

TO NINFA : I love you. Is my love returned?  
A. C.

Poor little words to cause in Ninfa's heart such a tumult of joy, in the señora's such a pang of anxious solicitude.

"And who is 'A. C.' pray?" the lady continued, with a hand laid heavily on Ninfa's shoulder.

"I do not know," the poor child confessed truly enough, and with burning cheeks.

"Ah!" was the grandmother's gratified exclamation. Then she quietly took possession of the note, and bidding Ninfa lay aside her mantilla and come to the dining room, she sailed out of the room without more ado. Afterward, when they were again alone, before retiring for the afternoon *siesta*, the Señora Barreda easily learned from Ninfa all that had passed between Anselmo Cárdenas and herself.

"Are you sure that you have spoken but one word to the young man, my daughter?" the grandmother asked, with her hand upon the girl's head as it rested against her knee.

"Quite sure," Ninfa murmured.

"And this is his first note?"

"Yes, yes, *mamá*."

"That is well. Now let me tell you, my child, that this is all at an end for the present. For the present, I say, because one does not know what may happen when—well, when you shall have become a woman."

"A woman I am now, *mamá*," said Ninfa determinedly, "but you and Justo Prieto are alike and wish to keep me always a baby. I will show him——" she added passionately, but was not allowed to finish her words.

"You will show him nothing, my little treasure," her grandmother said soothingly. "Justo is a good preacher and will be of service to me in many ways, but to you he will be nothing. What matters it what he may think you, whether woman or babe? Come, your eyes are tired, let me put you to bed for a little sleep. I will sit beside you and stroke your head until you fall asleep, as I used to do when you were small and had waked with a bad dream. Now you may dream that you are already a grown woman with all the world at your feet. You will wake and be glad to find yourself still at the old house at home, the little granddaughter of Alejandra."

Doña Alejandra had evidently talked herself into good humor, for by the time Ninfa had obediently laid her head upon the pillow, with her luxuriant

black hair streaming across her grandmother's lap, the latter was smiling contentedly.

"So far, so good," her thoughts ran, as she sat threading her fingers lightly through the glossy waves of the hair she loved. "Of course 'A. C.' is the advocate's son, Anselmo. He is a fine youth and will be a noble man one of these days. Who would have thought that the only family in the city with whom I would have wished to ally myself, had already established a sort of claim upon my little Ninfa? Pedro was right. Anselmo has had a reason for haunting our side of the street, though always thinking of my Ninfa as a child I had not dreamed that he could be seeking her."

Of course, however, this was not at all the way in which such an affair should be managed, and the Señora Barreda was delighted with the easy acquiescence of her granddaughter to her will. Thus had Vicente, her beloved son, always yielded to his parents. Never had there been a conflict between them—save one, and then it had been too late. The lady's brows contracted as she thought of the bride forced by this same son upon the proud house of the Barredas. But Ninfa was actually asleep by this time, and did not miss the hands that slipped from her head and folded themselves tightly together.

"I must send the girl away for a time," was the grandmother's conclusion, after some moments of

painful thinking. "Not to El Dorado, however, but farther away, even if it breaks my heart. When Justo comes I will consult with him. He knows Mexico better than I do, and I could never think of far-away Spain for her, my little Ninfa."

## VI

JUSTO came on the next day, much to the señora's relief. Ninfa was away at the time of his visit, attending the class of embroidery held at four o'clock in the afternoon at the girls' school of San Diego. Her absence was an added relief, for the grandmother had not been able to entirely overlook Ninfa's listlessness, interrupted by fits of genuine ill-temper, which had succeeded the expression of her will on the day before.

Justo was greeted, therefore, with more cordiality than on his previous visit. However, he persisted in ignoring, as before, the seat which would have placed him upon an equality with the lady of the house. After giving an account of many things as he had found them at the *hacienda*, with messages of greeting from the superintendent, Don Juan Tejada, and from many of the tenants, who were henceforth to be Justo's parishioners, the priest rose to go, saying with polite interest:

"I hope the Señorita Ninfa is well."

"Do not go just yet, Justo," the señora said, almost in tones of entreaty. "I need your help."

The priest resumed his seat and held his tongue until the lady should explain herself.

"Ninfa is quite well," she went on. "She is at school at this hour. It is of her I wish to speak to you."

"Of the señorita—to me?" Justo asked with surprise. "I cannot imagine how I can help you, Doña Alejandra. Yet I promise to do all in my power for the sake of——"

"Yes, yes, I know," the other interrupted him; "but there will be nothing for you to do. I wish your advice about a school for the girl. She must go to some good school where there will be other girls of her own station, where she will be taught music on the piano and many other things of which her grandmother is ignorant. Justo, I have a high ambition for Ninfa. She sings well, and it is a pity that her voice has never been trained. Do you know of such a school as I desire in the republic?"

Justo concealed his amazement at what seemed a caprice of the señora and bestirred himself to think of all the schools of Mexico of which he had any knowledge. At length he started perceptibly, but instead of speaking at once, he lifted his eyes from the floor and looked searchingly into the lady's anxious face.

"Well, what is it?" she asked impatiently.

"I wish I knew your real reason for selecting a new school for the señorita," was the unexpected reply, in the priest's slow tones, while his eyes still examined the señora's face.

"What can that have to do with it?" was the second impatient question. "It is my place to know the motive, yours to give the information I need, if indeed you have any to give."

It was hard for the señora to realize that Justo Prieto was no longer the unattractive little boy who had been in her way at El Dorado, and who had been so hard to suppress and so clever and keen of tongue.

"If you desire a cool and bracing climate for the young lady's health," Justo proceeded quietly, "I would recommend that of Saltillo, in Coahuila. It is a long way from here, perhaps three hundred leagues, but it has a glorious climate. I spent several weeks there with a priest, my friend, before coming south to Guadalajara."

"I was asking of schools, not of climates, if you will remember. Are there boarding schools in Saltillo?" the señora asked.

"Yes, there are two large schools for girls in Saltillo. I have my information from my friend, Arango. One is a nun's school. The *monjas* are kind and gentle, I believe, and I saw the long line of their girls walking in the Alamada each week. The señorita would learn to sing the hymns of the church, without doubt, in the school of the *monjas*, and it is said that the embroidery and other needlework taught is very beautiful."

"My Ninfa could teach the needle to any one,"

the grandmother said proudly. "I should never send her away to learn embroidery, nor even to sing the hymns and prayers of the church. Besides, in the present state of things the foolish child might even wish to become a nun if thrown without restraint among them; who knows? Yet one must risk something. You spoke of two schools," she continued, not noticing, in her interest in the subject, that her last words had suggested more than had been allowed to reach the surface in her previous conversation.

"Yes, there is another," was the reply; "but I do not think that you will care to hear about it, as it is Protestant and conducted by Americans from the United States of the North."<sup>1</sup>

"I know little about these *protestantes*," said Alejandra. "If in all respects, save that they are *protestantes*, their school seems a fit one for Ninfa, there is no reason why you should not tell me all you know of it."

"No one could remain in Saltillo for many days without learning much of the school, both good and evil," the priest went on. "But I should hesitate long before recommending the place to you for Ninfa Barrera. You are a good Romanist, and so doubtless is the girl. From what I hear, many

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<sup>1</sup> The Mexican Republic consists of the United States of Mexico, and the United States of America are called those of the North, in distinction.



Romanist girls enter and afterward depart converted to Protestantism. Would it do to subject your granddaughter to such influence?"

"You are advising me as a priest, not as a worldly friend, Justo," the señora said with a return of impatience. "Tell me all you know of the school. My curiosity is aroused by your hesitation."

"It is a long story, and in some respects a wonderful story," Justo began. "I doubt whether you will be able to give the time necessary for hearing it all."

"My time is my own," was the easy reply, "and I have all there is." The lady settled herself comfortably in her corner of the sofa, with slippered feet propped upon a stool, and signed to the priest to begin.

He seemed to be reluctant to undertake the recital, but the señora was inexorable.

"I have most of what I know from Arango," he said at length. "Arango has been in Saltillo for the purpose of studying English. He has had private lessons with one of the teachers of Madero Institute, the school of which we are speaking. He has asked many questions and has learned much about the school. Besides, he was at the Jesuit college in Saltillo at the time the school was opened and the church was built."

"A church!" the lady interrupted. "You do

not mean to tell me there is actually a church of the *gringos*<sup>1</sup> in Mexico."

The priest smiled.

"There are several, and that of the *bautistas* in Saltillo is a beautiful little building, with a history even more strange than that of the school. But I was to tell about the school. When the Americans came to Saltillo looking for a place in which to open a mission school, they found the Montez property for sale. It is a huge building, occupying a whole block to itself, with four streets surrounding it and the garden belonging to it. Of course, all was done that could be done to prevent the sale. The Montez mother and seven daughters were threatened with excommunication to the fifth generation and the final loss of their own souls, but the *americano* was indefatigable, and actually effected the purchase at something like ten thousand dollars. You see there was a heavy debt on the estate, and the Marqueta, as the building was called, had to be sold to the highest bidder. I could not learn what really followed in the case of the Montez family, because soon after the purchase by the American syndicate things advanced with such surprising rapidity that the priests and citizens could do little but stand aside and gape with astonishment. In some mysterious way, General Madero, of Parras, the governor of the State, was

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<sup>1</sup> Foreigners.

interested, probably by the wiles of the *americano* chiefly engaged in furthering the work, and was induced to endow several scholarships in the name of the State, for the benefit of poor girls desiring an education.

"The school was named for Madero and was put on a substantial footing, all papers being legally drawn up and properly recorded. The building was thoroughly improved and in 1884, I believe, it was opened with over fifty pupils. Why, it was unheard of! Absurd! A great Protestant boarding school opened in the very face of the clergy, and made attractive enough to invite the attention of rich parents as well as those of the lower class, who usually attend the *gringos'* service. One witty Jesuit called it the 'Protestant mushroom,' and wagered that it would wither and collapse as quickly as it had grown to maturity. He was wrong, however, for there it stands to-day, in a fresh coat of color, and filled with schoolgirls from many States. The director of the school is a man from the United States of the North, and most of the teachers are from the same country. The pupils are taught French and Latin, music on the piano, and singing, besides all the usual branches of school knowledge. And all is done in the most improved way, for the books used are of the newest, brought from New York, and the teachers are all highly educated. Exercises in walking, in marching, in standing, are

given at regular times, and once every week the whole school is taken out to walk, with the teachers to keep order."

"In imitation of the nuns' school, I suppose," the señora remarked composedly.

"To the contrary, I believe," the priest replied, with his slow smile. "The nuns' school has been established only since the Protestants began to take hold."

"But how can the Americans teach our children, when their language is English? I cannot understand," was the lady's next remark.

"Oh, they all speak Spanish. It is wonderful how soon they learn to do so. It is not like our Spanish, of course, as their tongues are hung differently and their throats are stiff. But they are easily understood after one gets accustomed to their way of calling words. And if one is going to learn English, there is no better way to do so than to take lessons of these teachers. Ah, the way they can talk English is beautiful."

"Could my Ninfa learn English, do you think, Justo?" Alejandra asked eagerly.

"Why not?" the priest replied, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Those Americans can do anything, I believe. They can certainly teach their own language to even the most stupid——"

"Ninfa is not stupid!" the grandmother interrupted him to say, in her quick way.

"To the most stupid pupils," the priest continued gravely ; "therefore, as I was going to say, there can be no doubt that the señorita, being unusually clever, would learn English perfectly, and very quickly, if placed under their care."

"Then you advise it? you think it would be well for me to send my child to Saltillo, to the *protestantes*?" the lady leaned forward eagerly in her chair as she spoke, with her eyes fixed on Justo's lips. She had almost forgotten the reason of her desire for banishing Ninfa from home for a time, in her interest in these wonderful *gringos* who had dared the church and the priests and had established themselves so securely on foreign soil. Why had they come? What was it all for? For money's sake of course. But there was no time now to enter on that question.

"Do you wish me to reply as priest or as worldly friend?" Justo asked.

"First, as priest," the lady answered, after a thoughtful pause.

"Send the señorita to the nuns at Saltillo," was the advice she received.

"Is no religion taught at the *gringos'* school?" she asked.

"Certainly. The Bible is read freely, and I believe that every pupil may own a copy if she wishes to do so. There are religious services in the school-room every morning, and on Sundays all who wish

to do so may attend preaching and school in the church."

"Then there is no compulsion used? I would not have Ninfa's pure faith harmed by their blasphemous teaching of religion, for all the English she might learn in a dozen years."

"I have heard that no compulsion is used, and that usually none is needed for inducing the pupils to attend their services. I suppose the day pupils go to their homes on Sundays. The *internas*<sup>1</sup> usually prefer the going out for a walk to church, through the streets and *plaza*, to being shut up inside of the building until the rest return. Mind, my dear lady, I am only telling you what I have heard of this school. Of myself, I know nothing—or very little."

"Then, as a 'worldly friend,' what would you advise for Ninfa?"

"That, if you are careless as to her religious sentiments, you will send her to the Madero Institute. A year there will make a thoughtful woman of the thoughtless child. Understand, however, that I think it would be a very dangerous experiment, and that the result may be the ruin of your peace of mind forever. And again I say, if you are merely thinking of an asylum for Ninfa for a short time, send her to the nuns. She will be safe with them and well cared for."

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<sup>1</sup> Boarding pupils.

The señora sat for a moment after the priest's last words in perplexed silence. Once she roused herself to ask :

"This Arango, of whom you have spoken, is he not in danger from the *protestantes*?"

"Arango is a man, and well fortified by the teachings of the true church. He can take care of himself," was the reply.

"So is Ninfa well grounded in the catechism, and in all that pertains to a young girl's knowledge of religion," the señora said thoughtfully. "She is faithful too, and I can trust her. Therefore," with a smile, "as my priest and my worldly friend cannot agree upon this matter, I will take the only sure way of solving the difficulty." As she spoke she rose and, lifting a pack of cards from a little table, handed it to the priest, begging him to select from the cards the ace of diamonds and the ace of spades. This he did, laying the rest aside.

Alejandra crossed the room and knelt before the marble image of Mary, explaining to Justo as she did so that he must shuffle the two cards from one hand to the other and that after commending the issue to the Holy Virgin she would choose one of the cards, the ace of diamonds representing the nuns' school, the other the school of the *protestantes*.

Perfect stillness filled the room while the lady prayed before the image and the man nervously fingered the scented cards.

At first Justo had taken but a languid interest in Ninfa's destination. Being of an analytical turn of mind, it had pleased him, for the moment, to analyze the details of the two opposing plans and to present them to his patroness in their respective lights and shades. During his visit to Saltillo, on the way home from New York, he had become as thoroughly acquainted with the management and scope of the Protestant college as it was possible for an outsider to become, having had, as he had explained to the señora, exceptional advantages to this end. He had been honest, therefore, in his special recommendations regarding this as well as the other school.

As the recollection of this school of the *gringos* had suggested itself to his mind, he had been startled, as was natural, and his surprise had grown as he had detected the señora's growing disposition in favor of the Madero Institute. As a priest he could but discountenance this favor. As a personal matter, he did not care one whit whether Ninfa should go to the nuns or to the *protestantes*. It seemed to him that this child was of undue importance in this small world to which he was again being introduced after six years of banishment, the world of the Señora Barrera and himself.

Yet while that lady kneeled before the image of Mary, and the silence became so deep that he could hear the watch ticking in his breast pocket, a new



thought occurred to the priest. By degrees a bright spot began to glow upon each dark cheek and his hands trembled.

Justo Prieto was ambitious. His admiration for Doña Alejandra's strength of will was great, and he recognized in her firmness of character something so like the best in himself, that he was assured of the true kinship of their spirits, whatever the difference in their social positions.

The weak spot in the señora's heart was undoubtedly her adoring fondness for Ninfa. The presence of this foolish girl must always raise a barrier between the señora and himself, serving to recall the years when the Indian lad had been nothing more than a servant's son. He would never be able to rise to the position of eminence which his ambition craved, and to which the señora's partiality and influence could certainly aid him, if this giddy girl was to be ever at hand to remind her grandmother and himself of the days of mud throwing and other youthful follies. Who was to hinder the other lady from viewing him through the younger's eyes? He had seen that Ninfa had not been in the least impressed by his years of travel abroad and his dignity of priest.

Now that there was a prospect of her absence for a year from Guadalajara, to what pitch of favor with the Señora Barreda might he not raise himself? Already he had been keen enough to see

that she might easily become dependent upon him in many things. In fancy he almost saw himself taking the place, not of the beloved Vicente of course, but of valued confessor and friend. Visions of preferment in the church, of the canon's robes, and even of the bishop's mitre dazzled his imagination. Yet Ninfa would return, after months of absence, perhaps before he had established the coveted ascendancy over the señora. Suppose she should not return; suppose that she should be induced at the nuns' school to take the veil, and perhaps be removed to Paris or to Spain; or, better still, suppose, among the *protestantes*——Horrible heresy! He would not consider such an idea for a second. Ninfa's soul would be forever lost under the realization of such a supposition. Surely the devil must have suggested such a possibility to his mind. He sighed deeply, wearied with the tangle of motives and desires possessing him. Then deliberately, as he thought, Justo resigned himself to the will of the "Queen of Heaven." His own will was to prove stronger than his renunciation.

A solemn voice broke the stillness of the room.

"I choose the card in your right hand, Justo Prieto."

The ace of diamonds showed for a brief second in the right hand of the *padre*. He caught his breath quickly, slightly shivered, then glanced over his

shoulder. The señora was still upon her knees, with her brow touching the table's edge. Like a flash the cards were exchanged, the ace of spades now lying upturned in Justo's right hand, while the left, clutching the ace of diamonds, fell limply at his side.

"Which is it?" Alejandra asked with forced calmness.

"Look," was the reply.

"The *protestantes*!" Alejandra cried, with a queer mixture of pleasure and affright. "It is Mary's will. So be it."

"Amen!" ejaculated the priest firmly, with uplifted eyes.

Yet when a few moments later on the stairs he passed Ninfa with the maid, Maria, returning from her embroidery lesson, his eyes were cast down before her bright and searching glance, and he merely lifted his hat to her in salutation.

"Poor Justo," Ninfa whispered in confidence to her maid, "*mamá* has been scolding him. Did you notice the red spots on his cheeks? I saw him look so one day long ago!"

## VII

SAD as it is to relate, it must here be confessed that the seventeen-year-old Ninfa Barrera could barely read a page of any book without making the most absurd blunders in the effort. There had been little in her rearing to stimulate a love for reading, as books were rare in the house, and for entertaining stories she had but to turn to her grandmother, who was well versed in the legendary lore of Spain and Mexico. Her education at the *hacienda* had been confined to a mastery of the *silabario*, or syllable book of spelling, and oft-repeated perusals of a small book on etiquette. In the latter she was instructed not to rinse out her mouth and spit the water upon the floor at meal times, not to suck the bones upon her plate, and to be always good-tempered and kind. From the time when her small, brown fingers first learned to hold a needle she had been taught to sew—not to mend the rents in her own little frocks, nor to darn her white socks, but to embroider letters on bits of cloth, and later to work in silks, and to draw the threads from linen for refilling with her own delicate stitches.

When she had removed to Guadalajara with her

grandmother and old Pedro, the porter, the lady had been so lonely in the great house that she had not spared Ninfa to attend a nuns' day school, in order to complete what is necessary to a Mexican girl's education. It had been only at the girl's urgent coaxing that consent had been given for her to attend the sewing class in the large school of San Diego.

Now the grandmother's eyes had been opened to two important facts by the reading over Ninfa's shoulder of the little love note of Anselmo Cárdenas. For one thing, she must manage to divert Ninfa's thoughts from Anselmo's suit, as yet unwarranted, without too much discouraging the little one. In the second place, something must be done to fit her granddaughter to be, some day, if all should go well, the daughter of the advocate, Cárdenas, who was a learned man himself. Anselmo, senior, would think twice before marrying his son, whom he had educated in Paris and in New York, to a girl with the brains of a peasant, even though the little "peasant" might bring as her dowry lands worth thousands of silver dollars.

While Ninfa, therefore, should be at a finishing school somewhere, she, the grandmother, would have the leisure and opportunity, unvexed by the child's altered looks, to arrange the marriage in the only approved fashion with the relatives of the lover.

She knew that the advocate was a man of advanced and liberal opinions concerning religious matters, and that his daughter-in-law would be none the less acceptable to him for having been "finished" at a Protestant college, if that college were the best in the republic, as Justo had represented it to be. That Anselmo's mother was dead, and the youth himself most likely of no religious opinions at all, made future operations all the simpler in prospect.

Therefore after the interview with Justo on Thursday afternoon, there was left only to inform Ninfa of the plan before making arrangements by post for her reception at the Madero Institute in Saltillo. Justo had told her that the new session of the school had begun in February, and as it would continue during the summer months, and even into November, there were no reasons why Ninfa should not leave home and enter the school without delay.

Ninfa received the news of the change to be made in her uneventful life as gracefully as her grandmother could have wished. It was evident that her heart was not inextricably entangled with the affections of the writer of her first love letter, for she clapped her hands softly as her grandmother unfolded her plan, and even had the naughtiness to think to herself at the end :

"So the señorito will wait beneath the balcony many a night in vain for Ninfa !"

Still she did not mean to be so cruel as to leave the city without a word of warning for Anselmo of the change to come over the course of their "true love," and she immediately began to set her wits at work to invent a way of communicating the news to him. Her grandmother, however, saved her the trouble of much thinking by telling her that as she was well acquainted with Anselmo Cárdenas' father, she would, if she should think best, inform the son through the father of Ninfa's removal for a year from her own home to the cloisters of the institute in Saltillo. Meanwhile, there must be no haunting of balconies, and Ninfa must never again walk in the street alone, though mountains of sand be sifted over the city and the dinners of all Guadalajara be burned to a crisp.

While a long and elaborate letter from the señora found its way to the director of the Madero Institute, and a speedy and satisfactory reply as to terms and accommodations traveled back to Guadalajara, Ninfa spent a rather harassing time. It was impossible to begin upon the new linen square recently set in her embroidery frame, so frame and all was folded up to be packed into the new trunk, already filling with necessary articles of bed linen and of clothing.

After the director's letter had been received and an answer had been sent, signifying a certain day in April as the time of Ninfa's departure for Sal-

tillo, an afternoon came when there was absolutely nothing to be done. The hired seamstress, working at her sewing machine in the corridor, would not allow Ninfa to help her for fear of being delayed by the little fingers, fit only for the intricacies of fancy work. The parrot was unusually noisy and made her head ache with his scolding shrieks. The grandmother had gone out with Maria to visit the shops in the colonnade surrounding the *plaza*, and had declined Ninfa's attendance because of the oppressive heat of the afternoon.

Ninfa walked disconsolately through the empty rooms, pausing at each of the drawing-room windows, not for an instant, however, dreaming of entering a balcony against the señora's commands. Besides, who would pace the white glare of that street at such an hour? Surely no one who carried an ounce of brains under the peak of his *sombrero* of dove-colored felt entwined with silver cord.

Sauntering into her own room, Ninfa suddenly decided to clear out the little wardrobe, built into the wall, where the dresses, now folded in the trunk, had hung. On the floor of the wardrobe and tucked away upon the shelves were many relics of her childhood; queer dolls of cloth stuffed with cotton, little jars and plates and cups of fancy pottery, and boxes filled with scraps of silks and velvets and ribbons. With a strange mixture of pain and pleasure, Ninfa arranged all these treas-



ures in compact shape and covered the boxes securely that nothing might be lost during the long months of absence from the dear white room.

As she gathered up the remnants of doll finery strewn about the floor, Ninfa spied a white card half hidden under one of the shelves. She took it carelessly into her hands, and then, struck by the beauty of a wreath of forget-me-nots painted on its white surface, tried to recall where she had seen such a card before.

"I will copy the little blue flowers on a handkerchief for my *mamá's* birthday," she exclaimed aloud. "They are prettier than anything I have, and I have just the shade of silk to do them with. Of course, there will be time to embroider a great deal at school, and there will be many holidays when there will be no books to study. *Ay de mi,*" she continued, a little drearily, "I know I shall die if I have to study many books ; and the English—oh, it will be impossible to learn it!"

She stood balancing the card upon her fingers before slipping it into one of the pockets of her trunk.

"I remember!" she thought suddenly, clapping her free hand to her forehead. "The *gringa* gave me the card on the day Guadalupe left me behind, when I went into the little dark room. I have never once thought of it since, and I suppose it fell from the waist of my dress when Maria hung it in

the wardrobe. Dear me, there is a great deal written on the card, but I think the señora asked me to read it. I know she said something about its being all true what was written here."

Within the forget-me-not wreath there were printed the following words :

*Esto es bueno y agradable delante de Dios Salvador nuestro :*

*El cual quiere que todos los hombres sean salvos, y que vengan al conocimiento de la verdad.*

*Porque hay un Dios, y asimismo un solo mediador entre Dios y los hombres, el hombre Cristo Jesus ;*

*El cual se dió a sí mismo en precio del rescate por todos (1 Tim. 2 : 3-6).<sup>1</sup>*

Slowly and painfully Ninfa spelled out the words. The type was fine, and the fanciful quirks and curls of the letters puzzled her. It had not been so difficult to read Anselmo's note, though that was written and these words were printed. Still, after some difficulty, she had read it all, and more than once, but she could not understand it. Having nothing better to do, she learned the whole by heart, as memorizing was an easy task for her. By and by certain of the words began to separate

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<sup>1</sup> "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour ; who willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all " (1 Tim. 2 : 3-6).

themselves from the whole and arrested her attention.

The sun sank slowly toward the mountains in the west and little airs began to stir the awnings in the corridor. The click of the sewing-machine sounded steadily, and the parrot having sobered down for a time, the pet canaries sang shrilly in their cages hung over the seamstress' head. Ninfa was now sitting at her ease upon a yellow goatskin spread before a low white chair, with her arms flung across the cushion of the chair. Though the *siesta* hour was long past, she had not yet troubled herself to dress for the evening, and was cool and comfortable in an airy costume of white muslin, flowing from the shoulders to the feet, and having wide, loose sleeves drawn up and tied at the elbows with pink ribbons. Her stockingless feet were thrust into little slippers of pink morocco, fancifully embroidered. Her loosened hair fell in heavy black waves far below her waist ; yet, easy as were her attitude and attire, the black eyebrows that matched the hair were puckered and the red lips screwed up into a tight little knot.

The words said that according to God's will "all men should be saved." And why not the women and the girls? Did not she know that the mother of God, the blessed Mary, was ready to help everybody, and especially to save women? What was this doctrine that the *gringa* had given to her as

the "truth"? She knew that the *protestantes* did not like Mary, the holy Virgin ; was it because she was willing to save young girls and women as well as *los hombres*, the men? And was not Mary the "Refuge of Sinners," the "Queen of the Angels, of the Patriarchs, of the Prophets, of the Apostles, of the Martyrs," and "the blessed Intercessor" between sinners and her divine Son? How was it possible then that there could be but "one Mediator," which meant the same as "Intercessor." There, it could not be the truth, and she would forget the words. Yet she must keep the card for the sake of the forget-me-nots, and perhaps some day she would become very wise, and if she should ever again see the *señora gringa*, she might have the courage to tell her of her mistake. So the card was dropped into its place in the trunk, and succeeding events banished for a time from Ninfa's mind all recollection of the words it bore within the wreath.

"Come, señorita," said the voice of Maria outside the door, "the señora says that I am to accompany you on a *paseo*<sup>1</sup> to Agua Azul. The afternoon is fine and you have been in the house all day."

As she spoke, the maid pushed aside the *portière* draping Ninfa's door, and the next quarter of an hour was occupied in the arrayal of her young

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<sup>1</sup> Outing.

mistress for the street-car ride out of the city. Maria sat on the floor and put on Ninfa's stockings and bronze boots as if the girl were still an infant, chattering all the while of the lovely French goods to be seen in the shops. Then, with wonderful quickness and skill, the black hair was brushed and plaited in two long braids, tied at the ends with purple ribbons.

When Maria had fastened the last hook of the new muslin frock of black, strewn with purple pansies, Ninfa's toilette was complete. No ; one thing was lacking, and just then the grandmother entered the room to supply the want. In one hand she carried a large hat of white straw, covered with masses of nodding pink flowers and ribbon bows ; in the other a new *rebozo* of silk gauze colored in delicate purple and lilac tints mixed with white.

"*Madre de Dios !*" Ninfa exclaimed in ecstatic surprise. "Ah, *mamá*, dearest, the hat cannot be for me !"

"For whom else ?" the señora replied proudly. "Do you like it, Ninfa ?"

The elaborate head-dress quickly passed from the grandmother's hands to Ninfa's and thence to Ninfa's head, and for reply the girl made a low courtesy to the señora and then to the smiling reflection of herself in the glass.

"Now try the *rebozo*, my dear," the grand-

mother said, offering the pretty scarf in exchange for the hat.

In a trice the long, gauzy *rebozo* was wound loosely about the smooth, black head and plump shoulders, as only a Mexican girl can manipulate such an article. One long, fringed end was tossed back over the left shoulder, and the harmony of the tints of scarf and dress seemed so perfect that the señora turned away with the hat in her hand.

"The *rebozo* must always be worn with that dress, Ninfa," she said with decision; "the hat will do well for the other muslin dress, but pink roses and purple pansies are a horror. Now go and have a pleasant ride with Maria. Perhaps it will be the last time you will go to Agua Azul, who knows?"

Maria was several years older than Ninfa, whom, in fact, she considered quite a child, and was even more trustworthy than Guadalupe, the cook, as a chaperon for the young mistress.

The little clouds, floating above the *plaza*, were already growing pink with the sunset as Ninfa and her companion reached the street of San Francisco and stepped into the open car bound for the baths on the outskirts of the city. The trip to Agua Azul was a favorite one for all classes, and the car was quite filled with passengers from the *plaza* when the two brave little mules, tandem style, trotted off with their burden. The air was fresh

now, and Maria drew her black shawl more closely about her shoulders, though her head was bare.

Crack! went the long, keen whip, ; faster and faster trotted the mules between long rows of many-colored houses toward the green fields and hills outside the city. At this hour the streets were crowded with people and donkeys, noisy with multitudinous cries, and odorous with the outdoor cooking of savory messes for those who should fancy an *al fresco* supper.

The great fountain, where man and beast were watering, was left behind, the cobblestones ended in deep, country dust, and the car sped onward between hedgerows and garden walls. It finally came to a sudden stop beside brilliant flower beds skirting the cool corridors of the bathing establishment.

It had been a reckless enough sort of ride, full of hairbreadth escapes for little children playing on the track and for the laughing, breathless passengers reeling in the outer corners of the seats at startling curves and sudden jerks. All left the car at the terminus, though most returned to their seats when the backs of the benches had been reversed for the homeward trip.

Ninfa pleaded that they might remain over until the next car should arrive and return, and Maria was as ready to do so after receiving the conductor's assurance that there would be several more cars arriving.

The car hastened away cityward, and soon the jingle of bells and clatter of hoofs were out of hearing. A damp, sweet odor of the country rose from the marshes behind the baths ; the frogs were already beginning their evening concert ; and the mountains in the distant east took on their sunset hues of purple and rose. For a while Ninfa and Maria paced the walks winding about the flower beds, thrusting their noses into the great bunches of heliotropes and gathering from the ground at their feet handfuls of rose petals, pink, crimson, and white, shed from the rose trees. A gardener gathered a nosegay of sweet violets and green leaves and offered them to the bright-eyed girl who seemed to love his flowers so well.

They had the little garden almost to themselves, for with the exception of one or two women left gossiping with the keeper of the baths, a black-gowned priest quietly reading at the far end of the colonnade, and the gardener, they were the only occupants of the place. The car delayed in coming, the wind blew with a touch of keenness now that the sun had slipped behind the peak, and Ninfa and her companion strolled inside of the sheltered walk and sat down on one of the stone seats near the priest.

As they did so, the reader lifted his eyes from his book and seemed for the first time to notice their presence in the garden, After a second's



hesitation, he slipped his book into the pocket of his gown, rose to his feet, and yawning once or twice as if bored or tired from his long reading, walked slowly toward the bench where Ninfa sat counting her violets.

## VIII

"IT is Don Justo," Maria whispered in Ninfa's ear, at the same time giving the girl a gentle nudge with her elbow.

Ninfa looked up brightly into the face of the priest, who seemed about to pass her without recognition.

"*Buenos tardes,*<sup>1</sup> *señorita,*" he said, catching her look and pausing a little uncertainly as she returned his greeting. Then he seemed to take a sudden resolution and, turning to Maria with some authority in his manner, requested her to leave the *señorita* with him for a few moments, as he had something of importance to say to her alone.

Maria hesitated and without rising from her seat looked at Ninfa for instructions.

"Go and see if the car is coming, Maria," Ninfa said laughingly. "You need not mind Don Justo, I am sure, for *mamá* would be quite willing for an old friend, such as he is, to speak to me. Hurry, Maria, for I am cold and in great haste to return home."

Then this mendacious young person turned her back upon Maria, reluctantly obeying her com-

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<sup>1</sup> Good-afternoon.

mand, and raised her large eyes, laughing no longer, to the priest, who had bided his time.

"I am surprised at you, Don Justo," Ninfa said; "but if you have anything to say to me, now is the time to say it. My grandmother will never allow you to speak with me alone in her house."

The priest bit his lips, but kept down his pride and answered calmly :

"For that reason I am here. I overheard the Señora Barrera say to the servant in the *plaza* this afternoon that she should send you out for a *paseo* to Agua Azul, as you were growing pale from confinement in the house. I took the first car out after that and have waited for an opportunity to speak with you. Not to waste words : tell me, on what day do you leave for Saltillo ?"

"On next Saturday," Ninfa replied promptly.

"And to-day is Wednesday," the priest mused. "When I last saw your grandmother she had not decided upon the day. Is all finally arranged then ?"

"Yes, all except the question as to whether I shall wear my new *tapalo*,<sup>1</sup> or an American hat on the train," Ninfa replied mischievously.

The priest frowned.

"As vain and frivolous as ever," he muttered impatiently. "Ninfa Barrera," he said sternly, "I am no longer the boy whom you delighted to

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<sup>1</sup> Black shawl, worn over head or shoulders.

despise and trample under your feet ; neither are you the child who would never study nor learn the least useful thing from her elders. Listen ! Do you know that I remember your father very well, and even your beautiful mother ? Did you know that it was I who heard your father's last words as the horse trampled him to death in the corral ? ”

Ninfa grew very pale as he spoke and stamped her foot on the stones. “ Then why did you not save my poor papa ? ” she cried passionately. “ I am sure the horrible horse would have preferred killing you.”

“ Perhaps,” the priest replied drily. “ Yet, as I was only a child of six, and had been ordered not to get down from the fence while my father branded the new horses, I was safe. Your father looked up at me from the ground just below where I sat half dead with fright, and I can never forget his look. ‘ May the blessed Virgin open heaven to my soul ! ’ was what he said, and no one heard but me.”

Ninfa was trembling like a leaf. Now, with all coquetry put to flight by the priest's cruel memories, she longed for escape from his presence. There was as yet no sign of the returning car, and quite out of hearing of the *padre's* words, Maria stood talking with the gardener. The old powerful influence of Ninfa's former playmate was closing about her. Little could she imagine that the priest's next words were spoken as a salve to his

own conscience, offended by his act of interference with the will of the Virgin Mary.

"Child," Justo began more quietly, satisfied that he had exorcised for the time the spirit of mischievous vanity possessing Ninfa, "for the sake of the last look from your father's eyes, and those last words from his lips, which I shall carry with me to my dying day, I am forcing myself to offer you a word of counsel."

At this Ninfa lifted her drooping head and looked full into the priest's colorless face with a sparkle of warning in her eyes.

"You are going to the Saltillo school as a little lamb astray in the dark woods, where there are fierce wolves wandering in sheep's clothing ready to snatch you from the path——"

"Are there any paths in those woods?" Ninfa asked, with a twitching at the corners of her mouth.

"Certainly, there is one path. The one trodden by your grandmother and your mother before you, the only right path."

"Are you sure that I am treading it now?" was her next question.

"If you are faithful to your religious vows, yes."

"And are all the other paths in the woods dangerous?"

"There are wolves wandering everywhere there, offering to lead you to what they will call 'better' and 'easier' paths."

"I should like to try something new," Ninfa said perversely. "I am tired of the old paths. That is why I am glad to leave my grandmother and go to the large school."

"But you will have to be careful, señorita. It will be hard to be faithful in your prayers. And you must never attend the Protestants' church service."

"Does my *mamá* say that I must obey you?" Ninfa asked. "She has not told me any 'must nots.' But Padre Justo, you really need not expect me to listen to your warnings. How do I know that you yourself are not a wolf in sheep's clothing trying to mislead a little innocent lamb like me? Who told my grandmother to send me to the institute if not the Mother Mary herself? She would naturally be more careful of me than you would, and we have been perfectly satisfied since she took the matter into her hands. Even Padre Manuel, my confessor, says that it must be all right, since *mamá* has offered fifty dollars to the shrine of Our Lady of the Rosary to bespeak a safe journey for me."

Justo had been seized with a qualm of discomfort at Ninfa's first words, but had experienced instant relief, as she had glided off from the subject of his responsibility.

"You are right, señorita," he replied courteously. "And the Lady Mother will hold you in her own

especial keeping. You will not remember my words of warning counsel against me, I trust. For the sake of our old friendship I ventured to speak. And now here comes Maria to tell you that the car is approaching. *Adios, señorita*, and may you have a prosperous journey."

He took her hand for a moment, and as she turned to leave the corridor, he offered his own to Maria to be kissed, as became his priestly character. He had taken something from his pocket before doing so, however, and before Maria followed Ninfa to the car, what he had held had been transferred to the servant's hand. The piece of silver had bought the maid's silence concerning the interview with Ninfa. Dusk was settling over the houses as the car unburdened itself of its passengers in the *plaza*, and already the lamp had been lighted in the court when Ninfa and Maria reached home.

The priest had remained at the Baths until the last car of all should return to the city, and having eased his conscience of its slight ache, he found himself ready to face the future that should succeed the departure of Ninfa on the following Saturday.

Señora Barreda, always attentive to the conventionalities of life, had been rejoiced to hear of the very seasonable journey from the city of Mexico to New York of a gentleman whom she had long known and with whose family she had been inti-

mate when a girl in the city. Business was calling him to the "States," and it was arranged by telegram that Ninfa should meet him at Celaya, whence they should travel together to Saltillo in the north. The grandmother herself chose to accompany Ninfa to Celaya, and the long ride on the train was undertaken with every preparation for comfort.

Ninfa had never traveled farther than the small station for the falls of Juanacatlan, a short distance from the city, and a whole day on the train, to be followed by a few hours in a hotel, and then by many more hours on the train again, offered unlimited scope to her imagination of the romantic and charming.

In the early morning of the day of her departure, she stood with her grandmother on a balcony overlooking the street, watching a *peon* below, who had shouldered her trunk and was trotting off with it toward the railway station. The horses were being harnessed to the family carriage in the court, and the stamping of their feet upon the stones resounded through the house.

Both travelers were ready for the journey, the señora in her usual black attire, wearing upon her head a mantilla of fine crocheted wool, and Ninfa in a sober suit of brown, with a beribboned hat of brown straw set above the coil of black hair.

Suddenly an apparition of shining silver spurs and buttons, of tan-colored buckskin, of searching,



honest eyes, flashed in the sunlight flooding the street corner just beyond the balcony. The satiny coat of a fine bay horse shone redly; a manly figure sat erect upon the Spanish saddle; a gauntleted hand was raised to lift the peaked *sombrero* from a head covered with crisp brown curls; and the Señorito Anselmo Cárdenas rode slowly past the balcony where Ninfa stood with her grandmother.

If Ninfa's head had not drooped just then, in unconscious acknowledgment of the greeting of the young man's uplifted eyes, she would have seen the señora's frank return of Anselmo's salute by a friendly bow and a slight wave of the hand. When she raised her head once more, the cavalier was already far up the street, and the carriage was rumbling up to the foot of the steps in the court.

An hour later the long train was rushing toward the east, leaving behind the domes and spires of the numerous churches of Guadalajara, and passing through the dry country which had long been panting and thirsting for the rainy season of June to begin.

Before the light of the Sunday morning broke over the hills, Ninfa had been delivered into the fatherly care of Don Santiago del Valle, the gray-haired compatriot of her grandmother, and the Señora Barreda had entered the return train for the west.



## PART II

### AMERICANOS OF SALTILLO

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Howe'er it be, it seems to me,

'Tis only noble to be good.

Kind hearts are more than coronets,

And simple faith than Norman blood.

—*Alfred Tennyson*



## I

SALTILLO, the capital city of the Mexican State of Coahuila, in the north of the republic, stands six thousand feet above the sea level. Viewed from the summit of the hill crowned by the ruins of the American fort, it seems little more than a huddle of flat, dirt-covered roofs, broken here and there by bunches of greenery representing orchards or small public gardens. Toward the west one sees the leafy growth of the Alameda, or public park, on the edge of the city. In the eastern limit, lies the Campo Santo, the holy ground, consecrated to the burial of the dead.

The towers and yellow-washed walls of the cathedral rise from near the heart of the city, facing the Plaza de Independencia. About the *plaza*, the main business portion of the city, is situated the municipal palace, the Tomasichi Hotel, and the *portal*, a lofty colonnade containing the chief drugstore and other shops.

Long, narrow streets lead in every direction from this central *plaza*, bordered by shops and residences of one story, colored pink, blue, green, or yellow, according to the taste of the owner. All windows are guarded by iron or wooden bars, as they look

directly upon sidewalk or court, and as a rule are closed by unglazed, heavy wooden shutters opening inside on hinges.

Yet this dry and dusty little city of nineteen thousand inhabitants has a peculiar charm of its own. The quaint by-streets, the long, blank orchard walls, the throngs of sandaled pedestrians wearing shawls and blankets of vivid hues, the bronzed faces, the overloaded little donkeys, bearing faggots or bundles of corn, the warm sunlight bathing the many-colored houses, and the brilliant sky over all, make ever-changing scenes, truly Oriental in character. It has been said by travelers that the city of Saltillo resembles the towns of Palestine as does no other in the New World.

In the hottest season of the year there is always shade and coolness in the *plazas*. The Plaza de Independencia is especially delightful, for under the dense foliage of the trees, called *fresnos de Japon*, or Japanese ash, there reigns a twilight of green shade, with the sunlight flickering here and there through the tangle of leaves overhead. A huge fountain plays in the center, where plump-cheeked cherubs lave their dimpled limbs of bronze in the clear water which the thirsty wayfarer may drink cold from the hilltop springs.

All around the city rise the rocky cliffs and summits of the mountains, separated from the street-endings by wide, dusty plains. These plains are

dotted with hamlets and small ranches, and the level roads traversing them are always clouded with the dust raised by the little scurrying hoofs of sheep or goats, by droves of charcoal-laden donkeys, or by the unwieldy cart of the country bringing vegetables and fruit to the market.

High and dry stands the city on the grand Mexican plateau, with an atmosphere as "exhilarating as a draught of wine." Clouds rarely dim the brightness of the sky by day, while at night the moon in her seasons shines with a soft radiance never realized north of the Rio Grande.

During the past three or four years something of modern haste and energy has been introduced into this old-world city, lying just two hundred miles below the Texan frontier. Street cars are taking the place of the lumbering coaches, swung high on their clumsy springs, and electric lights are taking the place of the oily lanterns suspended in the middle of the street by wires stretched from opposite houses.

In the days of this story, and they are not very long past either, the "curfew" rang at ten o'clock each night from the cathedral tower, warning all loiterers to their homes and beds. A little later the policeman in charge extinguished the lanterns swung across the streets, and the city was left in the darkness which was its safety.

One pleasant evening about the middle of April,

the back door of a certain house near the suburbs of the city stood wide open, admitting the last gleams of the sun, setting behind the hill of the French fort. The door opened from a hallway having a corresponding door at the other end leading directly upon the sidewalk.

A man wrapped in a coarse red blanket, and wearing the white cotton trousers and leathern sandals of the common workman, crouched on a stool, a little removed from the open doorway. His frowzed black head was tied up in a dingy handkerchief, which was in turn surmounted by a straw hat. The marks of long-continued suffering were plainly drawn upon his sunburned face, which was thin and covered by a sparse beard, and his hands were swollen and discolored.

A woman sat on the doorstep near by nursing an infant at the breast.

"Teresa, is not this Friday?" the man asked suddenly of the mother of the babe.

"Yes, and she will be here very soon now. Were you thinking it was only Thursday, Luis?"

"I wish she could come every eight days, instead of every fifteen," the man continued. "It is hard to give up one's only daughter for ten months in the year, with only a few hours of her company every fifteen days."

"Only a few hours!" Teresa repeated reproachfully. "Why, Luis, it is two whole days and three



nights. You forget that the director makes an exception in Lucita's case, in allowing her to stay from Friday afternoon till Monday morning. Most of the pupils must remain at school a part of Saturday for the sewing class, and all but our own daughter return on Sunday afternoons."

"Well, you need her, I am sure," the husband went on, wincing with pain as he attempted to draw his blanket more closely across his breast. "Since the rheumatism has clutched me so that I cannot work, and with the baby on your hands, I have been thinking of taking Lucita from the school——"

"Never!" the woman exclaimed, turning as she spoke to lay the now sleeping baby on a sheepskin spread on the earth floor just inside of the door. She threw a cloth over the little brown face and then rose to her feet and faced her husband, saying steadily :

"Lucita is going to school as long as the director and the other teachers will let her stay, which will be until she finishes the course. Then she will receive her 'papers,' and will be prepared to teach any public school in the State. Think of our daughter teaching a room full of *niñas*. Oh, it will be a beautiful sight!"

Luis nodded slowly in approbation of his wife's ambitious plans. He was as proud of his daughter's attainments as the mother could be.

Teresa picked up the stump of a broom and began vigorously brushing up the floor of the hall while she continued talking.

"As to your rheumatism," she said, "Lucita could not do your *adobe* making if she were at home, and Pepito, little as he is, needs nothing that I cannot do for him. When he is older and heavier I may need a child to carry him about for me, but by that time vacation will be here and Lucita will help. She is always willing to work when she is at home, and you know yourself that on the Saturdays she spends here she does all the mending and any other sewing there may be to be done. Her class in *costura*, she calls it, and she is also learning the beautiful stitches the teacher of *costura* shows the class at school on Saturday mornings. *Oyez!*"

The stream of words was interrupted by the sound of quick steps upon the stone outside of the street door, and the next instant the latchstring was pulled, the latch lifted, and a lady entered, followed by a tall slender girl.

"I suppose we may come in Doña Teresa," the lady said, speaking in Spanish, yet with a foreign accent.

"*Pase, señorita. Pase, Lucita,*" was the joyous response. "You are both welcome. Lucita, bring the chair from the room for the señorita. Take care, child, do not step on Pepito."

Luis raised himself to his feet after more than

one painful effort, and his greeting to the newcomers was as warm as his wife's. The daughter of the house seemed particularly glad to be near her father again, and after seating her companion lost no time in seating herself at his feet.

"I have but a moment to stay," the señorita said, "but as I am quite out of breath from climbing your long hill I will sit down, just to hear how you are, Don Luis. This fine breeze is not good for your pains I fear."

"But you are better, *papá*, I can see in your face," Lucita said.

Don Luis held up his knotted hand and then slowly outstretched one stiffened leg, as if to consult with his afflicted members before replying to the inquiries respecting his health.

"The *dolores* are very bad still, señorita," he said at length; "but they will be better now that my daughter has come home. That last liniment you sent by her did me much good; but Teresa rubs too hard."

"His flesh is as tender as Pepito's," Teresa interrupted compassionately. "But Lucita is better at taking care of the sick than I am. She is learning many things at school with you and the rest, besides the books."

"Yet it is your good hands that are supporting the family while Don Luis is laid up," the señorita reminded her.

Then, as the baby stirred on his sheepskin, and feebly clutched at the cloth over his face, Lucita reached over and gathered the little bundle to her breast, covering the face of her baby brother with soft kisses, and exclaiming between the caresses: "Oh, how sweet! What a darling! Look, Señorita Julia, are not his little hands and feet beautiful?"

The baby would have been beautiful, perhaps, if he had not been so very thin and feeble. The pinched features of the small face, and the white cloth tied closely over his head and ears gave Pepito the look of a dwindling, little old man. This likeness to a man was increased by the little one's dress. A short sack of flimsy pink calico covered the upper part of the body, while funny little pants of white cotton, drawn about the waist by a string, reached quite to the baby feet—a most handy, if grotesque, fashion of dressing a four-months-old baby.

The Señorita Julia duly admired the child, whose dark eyes and lashes were really pretty, and then turned to the scene beyond the open door.

"I always like the view from this door, Doña Teresa," she said. "I wonder if you know how beautiful it is! Those ruined mud walls of the fort up there, with the great gaps where the blue sky shines through, are like a beautiful picture, or rather a beautiful picture could be made from them. Then this tall palm tree half-way down the hill

toward us, with a little gray donkey usually grazing at its foot, and the stone wall at the back of your corral there. I always think how pleasant it all looks from this door when I get back to my room at the institute. Lucita is glad to be here again, I know, for it seems almost like being in the country when the front door is closed."

"I sometimes think about what you have been saying, señorita," the sick man said, with a smile wrinkling his worn cheeks, "only I cannot put what I think into such words as you use."

"My *papá* and I like best of all the colors in the sky," Lucita said quietly, letting her eyes rest on the soft pink glow spreading over the west. "The blue is beautiful, but we have that all day long and get accustomed to it, I suppose. When the sun goes down it is all changed, and different every day."

Even the plain features of Don Luis and his wife received a touch of the glory of the sky as their eyes followed Lucita's.

"But it will be quite dark before I get home," the señorita exclaimed, rising hastily to her feet. "I had not meant to stop, but you looked so peaceful and happy in here that I thought I might stay and enjoy my picture for a moment. All of the homes I visit are not like yours, Don Luis, and I think you and I know one of the reasons why it is so. What did you say? Sing? Yes, indeed, we

will. Come, Lucita, stand here in this lovely light and let us sing our evening hymn."

Lucita rose, and still holding the little brother clasped to her heart, joined in singing her father's favorite hymn :

*Sol de mi ser, mi Salvador,  
Contigo vivo sin temor ;  
No quieras esconder jamás  
De mí la gloria de tu faz.*<sup>1</sup>

With a hearty handshake all around after the hymn, and a reminder of the coming Sunday's services at the church, the señorita took her departure. She was followed to the door by Teresa and her daughter, who watched her until she turned a corner and was out of sight.

"Now, *mamacita*," Lucita said, "take the baby, and I will step to the shop at the corner and buy two cents' worth of cheese for *papá's* supper."

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<sup>1</sup> A translation of :

Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear,  
It is not night if thou be near ;  
Oh, let no earth-born cloud arise  
To hide thee from thy servant's eyes.

## II

LUCITA found enough to do in the poor place which she loved to call home to keep her busy during most of the next day. The sun had not yet risen when she slipped quietly out of the street door with a large water-jar of red earthenware in her hands. More than one trip was made between the house and the nearest fountain, and the broken sidewalk and half-way across the street in front of the house had been sprinkled before the summits of the western hills received their first touch of gold from the east.

In watering the street, Lucita had received morning greetings from her neighbors engaged in a similar office before their own doors. This watering, be it understood, was not a stingy sprinkling here and there, just enough to curl up little lumps of dust and then dry away under the first sunbeams, for the large jars of water were emptied with a wide-sweeping movement again and again until every inch of space, already swept clean by early brooms, was thoroughly wetted.

This early morning wetting of the streets, required by law of every house-owner or renter in most Mexican towns, makes the early hours of the

day peculiarly invigorating during the hot and dusty season of the year. Some of the women going to and from the fountain with jars upon their bare shoulders scarcely noticed Lucita, though only one or two absolutely refused to return her "*Buenos días.*" The general sentiment of the neighborhood concerning Don Luis Rubio and his family was that they were quiet and good-natured neighbors, even though they were *protestantes*, and this tall daughter of theirs, with the dignified carriage and the fair face, was not to be ignored except by the most fanatical.

When the street was done to Lucita's satisfaction, she swept and watered the hall inside the house, throwing open the doors at each end to admit the sweet air into the windowless apartment. A stir and a series of fretful cries from the baby inside the one room of the house arrested Lucita before she could transfer her labors to the *corral* behind the house.

Catching up her *rebozo*, which she had laid aside during the watering of the hallway, she wound it around her shoulders, and groping her way in the darkness to the mat where Pepito lay, lifted him tenderly in her strong arms. Her mother stirred and half arose as she missed the baby from her side; then, slipping from her hard bed, she followed Lucita. The girl had already tucked the little brother into a loop of her scarf, and the wee



black head had nestled against her shoulder in perfect content.

"He needs the fresh air, *mamacita*," Lucita said, as her mother stood at her side in the outer doorway, stretching her arms above her head and yawning over and over again. "And so do we all," she went on. "We learned last week in our physiology that it is almost a crime against ourselves to sleep in close, shut-up rooms like ours in there, *mamá*."

"But your *papá* could not have the night air with his rheumatism," the mother returned; "and besides, it is our custom to sleep thus, Lucita."

"We are not allowed to do so at school," Lucita replied. "The señorita makes us leave the shutters open in the upper half of the doors so that fresh air can come in all night, and there are only the bars between us and the corridor."

"That is all very well for the school," Teresa retorted a little sharply; "but you cannot expect to have everything to suit you in your poor father's house. You know that there are no bars to the window in the room, and as it opens on the street, it would be impossible to leave the shutters open while we sleep, though the window is so small and high above the floor. The *sereno*<sup>1</sup> would come along and wake us all up to close the shutters if he should ever find them open."

"We might have a hole cut in one of the shut-

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<sup>1</sup> Policeman.

ters," Lucita argued pleasantly, cuddling the baby against her neck as she spoke. "A hole so small that even my *hermanito* could not enter would do no harm and would make all of us sleep better."

"Did you not sleep last night?" Teresa asked quickly, looking suddenly into her daughter's freshly colored face. "You look well, but I suppose that is because of the good food and bed they give you at the school."

Stanch as was Teresa's faith in the Madero Institute, there were moments when a keen jealousy would prick her motherly heart at the thought that the home life of Lucita would more and more, as time advanced, present a strong contrast to the comfort and orderliness of the school.

"*Mamá*, do not speak so; you know that I love this house and my *papá* and the baby and you better than anything the school can give me." Lucita spoke earnestly and laid her hand on her mother's shoulder as she did so. She was already a head taller than Teresa, though her slim figure and youthful face made it clear that she could not yet have reached more than eighteen years of age. "It is you who are pale and unrested, *mamacita*," she went on. "The little man's crying could not keep me awake as it did you, and I heard even *papá's* groans, as in a dream. I am going to take care of Pepito all day, and he is always good with me, you know."

The mother smiled gratefully and went out into the *corral* to pour water over her face and hands from the jar left on the ground by Lucita.

While Teresa, wrapped in her faded blue *rebozo*, went out then to buy a few cents' worth of charcoal from the *carbonero* at the corner, Lucita sat down upon the doorstep and proceeded to take off the baby's clothes, which were the same as those worn on the day before.

"Poor little brother!" she crooned. "I wish thou hadst more little clothes to wear. Never mind; sister will make thee a new pair of panties to-day out of her old skirt, and to-morrow thou shalt go to church and hear the pretty music."

She poured some of the water from the jar into a small earthen dish and with a bit of cloth bathed Pepito's puny little body from head to foot. The baby stretched its limbs on Lucita's lap in great comfort under the cooling ministrations of the wash-cloth, and it took several washings to satisfy Lucita that her brother was quite clean. She longed for the generous tub, painted white inside, in which the little missionary baby at the school was bathed every morning and night. What fresh, white, cool skin was the result of those frequent baths! And then the soft towels and the fragrant soap and powder, and the charming white robes to follow the baths of that fortunate infant!

"But my *hermanito* is cooler in his jacket and

panties than the little *gringo* is in all his fine long clothes," she mused. "If I only had a bit of nice soap, Pepito would be as sweet as he is clean now."

Then she laid the child on the sheepskin, covering him with her *rebozo*, while she searched in the other room for another pair of small trousers. She found them at last, ragged but clean, and after dressing the baby proceeded to wash the other pair and hang them out to dry on a thorn bush in the *corral*.

Pepito was induced to go to sleep again after his bath, in time for his sister to help her father out of bed and to his stool in the warm sunshine, now flooding the *corral*.

Teresa returned with the charcoal, and a fire was soon glowing in the earthen brazier and water boiling for the coffee. Teresa had brought also a little paper of coffee, a loaf of coarse bread, and a cone of brown sugar with her from the store, and Lucita helped about making the coffee.

The ground grains were thrown into the boiling water, together with a generous supply of the brown sugar, and after a good deal of stirring of the black liquid so that the hard sugar might dissolve, breakfast was ready.

Three brown mugs were set on a cloth spread over a small bench outside the door, the loaf was broken into three parts, and the coffee was poured

smoking into the cups. Teresa and Lucita sat on the dry ground at the feet of Don Luis. Before a mouthful was eaten, the daughter asked for the blessing of the Lord on the simple meal and on the day before them. She had learned to do this at the school, and her words were in part those the Señorita Julia often used on like occasions.

“‘We pray thee, O Father, to bless this food to the nourishment of our bodies ; for it is from thy hand and to thy service is due the strength we shall receive from it.’ And bless each one of us, dear Lord, *papá*, *mamá*, little brother and me, and make us good and happy all day.”

Both Luis and his wife joined in a hearty “Amen,” at the close, and then the coffee and bread were eaten.

No finer, sweeter air ever blew through kings’ palaces than stirred the dusty leaves in the *corral* of this poor little home, and no bluer sky ever smiled above banquet hall more fitted for the enjoyment of man’s daily bread.

After the meal was eaten, Don Luis was left to watch the still sleeping baby, while wife and daughter went about their further household duties. He sat motionless in the sunshine for hours, reading from the large-print Testament opened upon his knees.

The light was, after a while, admitted to the dark bedroom, and a thorough cleaning accomplished

by Lucita, while Teresa made the *tortillas*<sup>1</sup> to be sold before noon to the market women. The promised "panties" were made also, and there had been enough left of the whole portions of the old white skirt with which to fashion a short slip for Pepito, to complete his costume for the morrow. The midday *tortillas* and onion stew were eaten, between the jobs of work, and in the afternoon Teresa found that Lucita's attention to the baby gave her time to wash and iron a skirt for herself and a shirt for Don Luis.

The full and happy day ended in another rosy sunset, and again Lucita found no trouble in sleeping soundly in the closed room on her mat in one corner. Her best *rebozo* of dark blue and white cotton and the freshly ironed skirt and waist of blue lawn, were ready for the next day, having been laid aside during Saturday while so much rough work was to be done. An old skirt and scarf were used at home on these fortnightly occasions of housecleaning and baby tending.

Ten o'clock of the next day found Lucita and her mother with Pepito in the church, where Sunday-school lessons were going on briskly. The baby was bright-eyed and happy, nestling within his mother's *rebozo*, and very wide awake for a time to all that was going on around him. He was so clean and shining of face, his long black hair was

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<sup>1</sup> Thin cakes made from crushed corn.

parted so evenly and brushed so smoothly, his eyes were so bright, and his new clothes so white and cunning, that the schoolgirls made much of him when the lesson was over. All the pet names possible were showered upon the unconscious "*chulito*," "little man," and "small scrap of heaven."

Before the sermon began, one of the older girls found an opportunity for giving Lucita a bit of news. She was a handsome girl with flashing eyes and the reddest of lips, and her name was Arcadia.

"You would better go back to school with us, after church," she said to Lucita in an undertone as she sat at her side. "The empty bed in our dormitory is to be prepared for the new girl who will arrive this afternoon. All the rest of us have gathered up our things from the bed and put them away the best we could, but we are going to be dreadfully crowded. Your books and your sewing are still on the bed, if the matron has not already moved them."

"The Señorita Berta will take care of my books, if she has had to move them," Lucita said with confidence. "And I cannot go back to school this afternoon, because I have promised to read to *papá*. I thought the new scholar was to have one of the little rooms to herself, Arcadia; and why does she come to upset things on Sunday?"

"Who knows?" was Arcadia's reply, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Our room is the best

and dryest, you know, and the nearest to the Señorita Julia's. Perhaps that is the reason. I'll see to your things, Lucita," she whispered, as the pastor, who was also director of the mission school rose from his seat in the pulpit.

After a short sermon and song service, there was a cordial hand-shaking at the door as the congregation dispersed. Pepito, now softly sleeping, a warm little bunch in his shawl sling, was noticed and duly admired by the mother of the other baby who had been left at home at the mission school. Pepito's mother and sister, however, were in a hurry to get home where Luis had been left alone, so they did not wait to see the marshaling of the long line of schoolgirls, giggling, whispering, and nudging each other in the aisles, as is the way of schoolgirls sometimes in the house of God, whether in Protestant or Roman Catholic countries.

A blaze of sunlight greeted Teresa and her daughter as they left the vestibule in the church tower, and the way home was long and steep. At the top of the long street, however, they found rest and coolness within the thick *adobe* walls of their home, and Don Luis in his clean shirt and headkerchief waiting to welcome them.

The rest day ended cheerfully, and even musically, in the sunset-lighted hallway, for Lucita led her father and mother in many a sacred song, dear to these three hearts because of the intelligible



Spanish phrasing, and because of the meaning given to the words by long acquaintance with them, through dark days as well as bright.

Doña Teresa and her husband had not been among the first in the city to embrace the new "doctrine" of the *gringos*, yet for several years they had been members of the church in the San Francisco *plaza*. The cheap prints of the Virgin and the saints had disappeared from the house walls, and Don Luis might have been often seen spelling out the verses from his New Testament, and reading them aloud to the wife as she knelt before her kneading-stones in the *corral*.

Naturally, Lucita had followed in her parents' steps, and with opportunities which had not been theirs, the girl gave promise of becoming a useful Christian woman of more than common intelligence.

Pepito, having as yet no further responsibility than that of imbibing his proper nourishment in the shape of milk, air, and loving tones and smiles, had not chosen his religious creed. He was only a plain, brown, long-haired little Mexican baby, like thousands of others around him.

### III

WHEN Lucita entered the corridor of the institute at half-past eight the next morning, her thoughts were still busied with the family she had just left behind ; with her father, who had been diverted from his pain by her reading and other daughterly attentions, with her mother, whose tired arms and hands she had relieved in more ways than in taking charge of the baby, and with Pepito himself, who had actually cried for her when she had left him in the mother's arms just twenty minutes before. These thoughts were not long allowed indulgence, for her friend Arcadia and one of the younger girls, named Luz, came running to welcome her, with the news of the latest arrival tumbling helter-skelter from their tongues.

"Do not go into the dormitory yet, Lucita," Arcadia counseled her. "The señorita will not let us in, because the new pupil does nothing but cry, cry, cry. She cried all night, Luz says——"

"Yes, she did," the little girl chimed in eagerly. "My bed is next to hers and I heard her. Once I asked her what was the matter, and she said the bed was so hard she could not go to sleep. What a goose to cry about that !"

"It was not the bed, Luz, as I have told you over and over again," Arcadia answered. "She is homesick, the Señorita Berta says, and not used to having so many noisy girls around her. She looks really ill, and her eyes are all swollen and red. Where are you going, Lucita?" she asked. The three girls had been slowly walking, arm-in-arm, along the corridor upon which the dormitories opened.

"To our room," Lucita replied. "I must change my dress right away, because the first bell will ring in a few minutes. Besides, my books are all in there. Who is with the new girl, Arcadia?"

"Nobody but the matron. She went in after she had sent Macedonio off to market, and she told the girls to be quiet on this side of the court, because Ninfa has a headache. That is her name, Ninfa Barreda."

Notwithstanding Arcadia's advice, Lucita quietly pushed open the door of a long room before which they had paused as Arcadia spoke the last words. In obedience to the matron's wishes the other girls remained outside, much as they would have liked to enter and see what Lucita would do when the señorita should order her out again. But the señorita did nothing of the kind. Lucita walked noiselessly toward her own bed at the farther end of the room, and with only a whispered "*Buenos días!*" to the lady as she passed her.

The new scholar, Ninfa, lay asleep at last in another little bed, exactly like the seven others ranged along the wall of the dormitory. This bed was about half-way down the room and therefore at some distance from Lucita's. The matron of the school sat on a chair at Ninfa's side, looking with pity down upon the pale and swollen face upon the hard, round pillow.

While Lucita was exchanging her lawn dress for one of plain brown calico, the first school bell clanged through the court, and for a moment or two changed the usual quiet of the hour into a brazen uproar. This was followed by a skurrying of little high-heeled shoes from all sides into dormitories for books and slates, to the fountain's side for last sips of water, and in and out of the school-room doors. Quiet reigned again before Lucita was quite ready to leave the dormitory, and as she gathered up her last book and was tiptoeing toward another door nearer her corner, a burst of singing sounded from across the court.

"Lucita, wait a minute, my dear," the Senorita Berta said in an undertone. "I want to speak to you."

The lady had approached and now laid her hand on the girl's arm to arrest her as she was hurrying out.

"If you will stay here in the dormitory with this poor child, Lucita, I will ask the teachers to excuse

you from recitations for an hour or two," she said. "Poor girl, she is really ill this morning, and I should be sorry for her to wake suddenly and find herself alone in here, where all is so different from what she has been accustomed to."

"Has she been used to anything better than this?" Lucita asked wonderingly, glancing over her shoulder down the neatly arranged room with its clean little beds, its chair for each bed, and its candlestand at each end of the room.

"Well, yes," was the reply, while the lady looked affectionately into Lucita's grave eyes. "You think this room is good enough for anybody, do you not? and so do I. But I may tell you, Lucita, for you are kind and thoughtful, that this girl has probably never before been in so poor a place, and though she is genuinely homesick for her grandmother, she really suffers in part because she is not so comfortable here as she would be at home. I think you can help me about her if you will try, because you will know better than I what to say to her when she wakes. I will go now and speak to the Señorita Dora and ask her permission for you to study here. You may take your books to Ninfa's bed if you like. At recess, if she is awake, the girls may of course come in and out as usual. I only wanted quiet this morning so that she might sleep a little. It will do her good to mix with the girls as soon as possible after she is rested."

Somewhat loth to accept the charge given her, Lucita watched the señorita cross the sunny court to the opposite side of the corridor and disappear within the schoolroom door. Then she turned away and walked slowly with her books still in her arms toward the chair the matron had left, at Ninfa's bedside. She laid all but one of her books behind her, on Luz Coiro's bed, and then tried to interest herself in the lesson for the day from the "*Historia Patria*" in her hand.

Lucita was a little indignant at this commotion caused by the new arrival. She was a girl who liked doing things by rule and as they were done every day. As she sat now, holding the fat little history before her eyes, she knew exactly what was being done, minute by minute, in the different schoolrooms over the way. She herself should have been sitting on one of the high benches at the far end of the large room whose doors opened on the corridor, preparing her lesson for a recitation in one of the back rooms looking out on the *corral*, with its high *adobe* walls.

All around the room little girls were seated, elbow to elbow, and perhaps studying, until their turn should come to form a half-moon about the Señorita Dora, whose trim little figure occupied the teacher's chair at the other end of the room. In one of the back rooms the Señorita Julia would go on, hour after hour, during the morning session,

hearing the classes of older girls as they would go to her at the striking of the Señorita Dora's bell. Here the great wooden shutters of the *corral* windows would be thrown wide open to let the warm outer air enter and take the chill from the damp and shady room. The blackboard would fill with figures, the globes would spin round and round, and the chalk dust settle whitely over heads of glossy black hair and varnished desk lids. In another back room the Mexican teacher would instruct his classes with all the fervor of purest Spanish and in his good-natured way allow the girls to chat amicably among themselves.

The blue sky, striped by the black window bars, would grow pale in the light of the mounting sun, until the strokes of the noon hour should crash from the cathedral towers and the court again fill with laughing girls and their chatter.

In the afternoon the señoritas would exchange places, Julia remaining with the younger children, and those older ones who were preparing lessons, while Dora would occupy a third back room, to teach the beauties of the English language.

Lucita let her book fall into her lap. Would she be expected to spend the whole day sitting beside this hysterical girl? Was she to miss the delightful map-drawing of Monday mornings, and her favorite English study in the afternoon? She gave a searching glance at the sleeping face and then

softly laid her hand upon the cover tightly tucked about Ninfa's shoulders. There was no response to the touch, for though Ninfa had started and moaned slightly as the loud-voiced bell had sounded for prayers, Lucita's touch did not disturb her at all.

Now and then a sobbing catch in her breathing reminded Lucita of her little brother's disturbed sleep after a severe attack of some infantile ailment.

An hour passed. A recess of five minutes filled the corridor on the other side with the murmur of voices, then quiet reigned as before.

Lucita, by degrees, almost forgot her surroundings in studying the day's English lesson. It seemed to her very wonderful that, by pronouncing the strange words, "Education is a great benefit to the human race," she should be only stating so simple a truth as that "*La educacion es de gran provecho para la raza humana.*"

How fascinating it was to be learning to speak sentences of real sense and meaning in the English language! Even the talk of the señoritas among themselves, which months ago had seemed like silly jargon in her ears, was now beginning to be here and there intelligible, because of the new words she was learning each day in the English class.

While she was still practising the pronunciation of the hard word, "education," which was spelled



so nearly like "*educacion*," yet pronounced so differently, a deep sigh rose from the pillow at her side, and Ninfa opened her eyes. For a second or two each girl looked at the other without speech. Then Ninfa buried her face in the bedclothes with a woful cry. Lucita tossed her English grammar on the bed and threw her arms about the sobbing girl.

"What is it, *pobrecita*?<sup>1</sup> Does your head ache? Can I do anything for you, Ninfa Barreda?" she asked, at intervals. "Have you had any breakfast?" she added, suddenly guessing rightly, that the señorita had been unable to induce Ninfa to eat a mouthful.

"I want nothing," Ninfa answered chokingly, though she turned her face toward Lucita now, and pushed her tumbled hair from her face with a weary gesture.

"Promise me not to cry while I am gone, and I will go and get you a cup of coffee," Lucita said, patting her on the shoulder. "The Señorita Berta will let me have it for you, nice and hot, and then you will feel better. Promise me," she added with playful firmness. "I shall not leave you unless you do."

"But I do not wish coffee, nor anything else," Ninfa persisted, the corners of her mouth curving into a smile however.

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<sup>1</sup> Poor little thing.

"Promise," Lucita insisted quietly.

Ninfa hereupon rebelled at this strange girl's obstinacy, as she considered it, and withdrew herself petulantly to the outer edge of the bed where she lay watching her companion with dry eyes a little dulled from want of sleep and many tears.

Lucita opened her grammar and began to study as if nothing had happened. She was not accustomed to being withstood in this manner, for in the school her word was as law among all the younger girls, who were seldom slow to learn that Lucita's commands always worked out their own pleasure and success far better than plans for themselves could do. This girl must surely be much younger than herself, for she looked very small as she lay curled up under the bedclothes, yet her wide eyes were already looking defiance into her face.

Something in the intensity of Ninfa's regard drew Lucita's attention from her book. She turned again to Ninfa, exclaiming cheerfully :

"Come dear, why do you not get up? I think you will feel better if you do. Of course I cannot force you to drink coffee, if you do not wish it, but I can help you to dress yourself."

"I cannot dress without Maria," Ninfa pouted. "I wanted *mamá* to send her with me, but she said I must learn to take care of myself. Oh dear! I wish I was at home. Every thing is poor and mean here and I do not like it."

Lucita's uplifted head, and the sudden grave look that came into her face arrested Ninfa as she was about to enter upon another sobbing fit.

"Was I impolite?" she asked softly, sitting up in bed the better to peer into Lucita's face, which in despair was bent over her book again. "I did not mean to be impolite, but it is so different here."

"It is cool and clean, I am sure," Lucita said loyally; "and schoolgirls do not need fine things in their rooms if they come to school to study, the Señorita Julia says."

"But the *comida*,"<sup>1</sup> Ninfa continued discontentedly. "You were not here last night, were you? I know I did not see you in here at bedtime. The supper was nothing in the world but *tortillas*<sup>2</sup> and *frijoles*,<sup>3</sup> with coffee, and at the end one little banana apiece. I shall starve, I know. But I suppose you are accustomed to it. Where were you last night?"

"At my home," Lucita replied briefly.

"Oh! you have a home in Saltillo then, and can get away from school whenever you like. But isn't it very hard to leave your home and come back here again?" Ninfa asked confidentially.

"It is hard to leave my family, but I am glad to be again in the institute," was the reply. "But, Ninfa, if you are not going to get up and dress,

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<sup>1</sup> Food.

<sup>2</sup> Corn cakes.

<sup>3</sup> Beans.

you must not keep talking to me, because I must study my lessons. Lie down and go to sleep again."

"What is your name, girl?" Ninfa asked abruptly, paying no heed to Lucita's words.

"Luz Rubio; but every one calls me Lucita."

"I shall call you Luz, not Lucita," Ninfa announced.

"Why?" Lucita asked, with a wondering look at this impetuous little creature.

"Because Luz is the prettiest name in the world for a girl," Ninfa replied.

"I like Ninfa better," Lucita said, closing her book with a sigh. She saw that there would be no more studying for her until her post should be relieved.

"I had a little sister named Luz," Ninfa went on. "She died when she was eighteen months old. We were twins, and she would be my best friend if she had lived. I have so many things to tell a sister, if I had one, but there is nobody at all now but *mamá* and the servants, and—Justo," she added with a smile and a blush.

Perhaps in her own mind another name took the place of the priest's. But then, she had no sister to whom she might tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," and it would not have done to be hinting at secrets so soon to this strange girl who, in Ninfa's opinion, was inclined

to be severe, and who had possibly never had a lover.

"Was your little sister like you?" Lucita asked.

"Not a bit," Ninfa replied readily. "*Mamá* has often told me about her. Her eyes were gray and her hair was light, and her skin was not brown like mine. You too are fair, Luz; and do they call you *huerita*, as *mamá* did my little sister?"

"Sometimes," Lucita admitted; "but I like black eyes and hair best. We have another Luz in our dormitory," she continued. "Her father was an Italian, but her mother is a Mexican. I think you will like little Luz. She is very pretty, and her mother dresses her beautifully and gives her a great deal of money to spend."

"I like you best," Ninfa admitted, to Lucita's great surprise. "And you need not think that I am going to keep with the little girls if I am small. I am seventeen years old and will be eighteen next January. How old are you, Luz?"

"I also will be eighteen next year," Luz replied. "I thought you were about fourteen, Ninfa. Perhaps then you will be in my classes. Do you know any English yet?"

"Not one word," said Ninfa apprehensively. "And I suppose such a great, tall girl as you, is a long way ahead of me in everything. You ought to be, I am sure. Now I am going to dress, because if I stay in bed you will study some more

and try to keep me from talking. Will you please put on my shoes and stockings for me?"

Lucita stared in amazement at this unexpected request and was no less surprised, a few moments afterward, to find herself on her knees beside the bed, executing the demand put upon her. It seemed very easy for this small person to command, and, strange to say, an easy thing also to obey, when there was nothing more required than the clothing of the two pretty little feet swinging over the edge of the bed.

Ninfa's whole toilette had been completed with Lucita's active assistance, when the matron entered the dormitory a while later, to relieve Lucita. She had brought a baker's roll and a cup of coffee on a tray for Ninfa's breakfast, and this time the refreshments were not refused. Lucita's willing ministrations had restored much of Ninfa's usual good spirits, and the matron smiled to herself at the sight of the girl's innocent assumption of the right to command over Lucita, who was usually slow to yield a certain innocent self-importance to any one.

When Lucita was fully released from her novel duties as maid, Ninfa begged that she might accompany her wherever she should go. So to the schoolroom she went, at Lucita's side, and there she remained, contented and open-eyed, during the rest of the morning session.

#### IV

THERE was too much of novelty and interest in the new life to allow the indulgence of continued homesickness on Ninfa's part, and the Señora Barrera, her grandmother, would have been astonished at the ease with which her pet adapted herself to her changed circumstances. It is true that Ninfa at first rebelled audibly against taking her turn at washing face, neck, and hands in one of the three tin basins with which the dormitory was provided. She did not enjoy spattering her shoes at the hydrant beside the fountain while drawing her own water for this morning bath, nor would she trot across the court to the fountain with bare feet, to save her shoes and stockings from the wetting.

On the second morning the breakfast bell had rung before the helpless child had half combed her long hair, and she had hastily wound her *rebozo* about her head, hoping the señoritas would not detect this evasion of one of the strict rules of the school.

When the Señorita Dora, to whose table both Lucita and Ninfa belonged, saw this closely shrouded head in the midst of the dozen others

bare and glossy, a sharp reprimand rose to her lips. Then she remembered that Ninfa was as yet strange to the ways of the place, and contented herself with gently laying her hand on the girl's head for a moment, saying kindly, though firmly :

"To-morrow, Ninfa, you must rise earlier, so that you may be ready for breakfast. I cannot excuse you a second time if you come to breakfast uncombed. We do not allow coffee to those who come to the table with imperfect toilettes."

Something of injured helplessness in Ninfa's face touched Lucita, who sat on the opposite side of the table. She herself was so particular to keep all the rules, and she had been for so long a pupil of the school, that she was little disposed to sympathize with slackness in others. Therefore, she was surprised at herself when she felt a wave of pity sweep away her disapproval of Ninfa's slowness and fine-ladyism. Though she knew now, as well as she had known it before the señorita's warning, that Ninfa had been up a long hour before breakfast and had taken no part in the cleaning of the dormitory, save the careless spreading up of her own bed, Lucita found herself, after that look across the table, more than willing to make excuses for her companion.

"I'll help her do her hair every morning," she thought. "The poor child eats so little of our *comida* that she cannot do without her coffee."



From that time on Lucita, the dignified and dependable, became the slave and familiar friend of Ninfa, the wayward and spoiled.

The teachers approved of the intimacy, for it would do sober Lucita good, they affirmed, to be shaken up now and then by the caprices of the lively southern girl, and it was truly wonderful to see how soon Lucita's rare laugh became more and more frequent, and how it began to share in the melody peculiar to Ninfa's.

On the other hand, the larger girl's influence over the smaller was all that could be desired. Ninfa had ere long bewitched Arcadia into exchanging beds with her, so that she might sleep beside Lucita, and though the allotted feet of space might intervene between the two beds during the daytime, it was otherwise at night. After the monitor of the dormitory had extinguished the two candles allowed for the going to bed, Lucita, each night, would push the two beds close together, and the two girls would sleep side by side, often with hands clasped and both heads, the black and the brown, lying upon one pillow.

With this care surrounding her, Ninfa was stimulated, during that first week, to do her best in studying the simple branches belonging to her class in school. She was in reality much chagrined at finding herself so far behind Lucita and most of the other girls of her own age. For two or three

days she was inclined to sulk at the idea of being classed with ten-year-old Luz Coiro and others of the younger children. Her naturally easy disposition, assisted by Lucita's sympathetic encouragement, prevailed here, however, and the week had not passed before she was interested in the new method of study observed in the school, and completely enthralled by the fascinations of the piano.

Housework was the sorest of all trials to the luxuriously reared Ninfa. Though Macedonio, the porter and man-of-all-work, when not too lazy, drenched the court and corridors with water from the fountain in the early morning of each day, the girls sprinkled their own dormitories, and little of the dust of the unpaved street outside found its way into this inner row of rooms.<sup>1</sup> Ninfa had to yield to public sentiment in the matter of taking her share in the daily sweeping and sprinkling of the dormitory, and the queer, little hard places, which had followed the blisters made upon the palms of her hand by her first day's use of the broom, were sources of great affliction to her. She was glad that they were not visible while she stretched her small hands over the piano keys. These hands were shapely and smooth enough, barring the tiny callouses, which Lucita assured her would disappear after a time, but they were

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<sup>1</sup> For interior arrangement of Madero Institute, see Appendix II., at close of book.

undeniably brown, no matter how clean she kept them. Lucita's were much fairer, as fair as the Señorita Julia's, Ninfa thought, and yet Lucita had no desire to learn to play the piano.

Notwithstanding the corns and the despised tint of Ninfa's hands, they became more useful and busy little members than they had ever been in the grandmother's house, and Ninfa herself grew as contented as were all the other girls in that hive of busy, happy bees.

Don Justo, the priest, had been right in his conclusion that no compulsion was needed to induce most of the boarders to attend Sunday services in the Protestant mission church on the *plaza* of San Francisco. It is true that there were a few among the older girls who occasionally chose to remain at home rather than accompany the others. These were always Roman Catholics, who may have been visited now and then by qualms of conscience as to the propriety of conforming to the Protestant forms of worship. Yet this staying at home was found to be a poor exchange for the brisk walk, in line, through the fresh mountain air sweeping the streets at the hour for Sunday-school, and the pleasing excitement of the passage of the *plaza* whose benches were filled with staring citizens or students from the State College opposite the church. No fancy-work was allowed on Sunday, nor the

study of any school-book, and one could not sleep *all* the morning, after baths and breakfast had dispersed any lingering desire for such indulgence.

Ninfa was not a little troubled when her first Sunday arrived at finding that there would be no one to accompany her to mass in the cathedral.

"I cannot possibly go alone," she said to Lucita, who was brushing her hair before breakfast.

"Of course not," Lucita answered.

"Then what shall I do, Luz? Padre Manuel said that I must never fail to go to mass at least once a week. He will be very much displeased if I write to *mamá* that I cannot go; yet even he would not expect me to go into the streets alone."

"I do not suppose your grandmother thought that you would go to mass from this school when she sent you here, Ninfa," Lucita replied. "No one goes, you know."

"Yet many of the boarders are Roman Catholics, Luz. They have told me so, and how they hate to have to go always to the church of the *protestantes* if they go anywhere. *Valgame Dios*,<sup>1</sup> how you are pulling my hair! You need not get angry even if you are a Protestant, Luz Rubio."

Lucita continued a vigorous use of the brush without reply, while Ninfa went on with her murmurings. They were seated on the stone step

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<sup>1</sup> An oath universally employed to express sudden surprise or chagrin.

surrounding the fountain basin, and there was no one near them at the moment, as it was still early and not all the girls were out of their beds. The rising bell was a little more indulgent on Sunday mornings, for the busy services of the day to follow did not give the perfect rest of an idle day.

"I wish I were like you, Luz," said Ninfa, after a little, submitting with unusual patience to Lucita's ardor with the brush. "You have a home here in Saltillo and can go there every fifteen days. Next Sunday you will be at home and I shall be alone.

"You will have Arcadia and Angela and the others, your Roman Catholic friends," Lucita replied, a little ungraciously.

Yet she was not pleased with herself for the sudden flare of anger she had felt at Ninfa's allusion to her being a Protestant. It had seemed to come from Ninfa as an intimation of inferiority, and rich as she knew Ninfa to be, and pampered as to this world's goods, she had hitherto taken comfort to herself in the knowledge that her own mental capacity and attainments more than equalized matters between them. Besides, she had been for so long connected with the Americans of the school, and so large a majority of the pupils were those favoring, if not adopting, the Protestant doctrine, that she had hardly realized that her faith might belittle her in the eyes of the world. It was a delightful world to which Ninfa's artless con-

50: fidence had been introducing her during the past week. Ninfa's people knew nothing of her religious faith and blindly considered all that her dear señoritas could teach her as perversions of the truth, if not downright lies. While "the world's" mistake could not alter her belief in what she knew to be the truth of God, she was conscious of a new feeling in her heart that had never been there before Ninfa's prattle had emphasized the difference between them, and had proved the fact that no one with her strange ideas could have a place in Ninfa Barreda's world.

Yet she was ashamed and grieved that she should have been even the least bit angry with Ninfa over such a subject, and her ungracious reply was followed by a complete change of manner.

"You darling child," she cried, dropping the brush and clasping Ninfa in her arms. "You do love me best, don't you? And I shall not give you to any of them, Catholic or Protestant. Forgive me, little one, for being angry with you."

"Why, you only pulled my hair," Ninfa replied wonderingly.

"My fingers only pulled your hair," Lucita said quaintly; "but a great black cloud came into my heart for a minute, and Somebody was sorry. He saw it, if you did not."

"Who?" Ninfa asked, staring at Lucita with her great eyes shining through her waving hair.

"Never mind," Lucita replied shyly. "It is all gone now and he knows. It is all right."

"Was it a man—your lover? Oh, Luz *mia*, have you a lover too, and have never told me about him?" Ninfa asked reproachfully.

"Hush!" Lucita commanded. "Oh, Ninfa, Ninfa, how much you have to learn!" she continued in a softened tone. "If you were my little sister, how gladly I would teach you about our Father, and about Jesus."

"You are a strange girl, Luz," Ninfa said, parting the hair from her eyes and catching up the brush which Lucita had let fall on the stones. "Why do you say 'our father'? You know that my father is dead, and yours cannot be mine. Besides, your *hermanito* is named Pepito, not Jesus.<sup>1</sup> But if you do wish to tell me about your father, take me home with you next time you go, dear Luz. Then I shall know more than you can tell me."

Again a shadow fell over Lucita's spirits. What would Ninfa think of such a home as hers? But she must hasten and explain to this ardent child what she had really meant, lest more mistakes should follow.

"Listen, Ninfa," she said solemnly. "You have not understood me. God is the Father of whom I was speaking, and Jesus is the Christ, his Son.

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus is a very common name in Mexico.

You know that he knows all things, and it was he who was sorry when I was cross with you when you spoke of Protestants. I am glad that I am a Protestant, there ! and I hope you will be one some day."

"Never in this world," Ninfa cried, horror-stricken. "And do you know, Luz, that is the only thing I do not like about you."

"Yes, I know you do not like it," Lucita said humbly ; she had been made humble for that time. "But that does not make it wrong to be a Protestant, you know, Ninfa, and perhaps you will think differently about it some day. I am going to pray to God every day and night to teach you the truth."

"The truth !" Ninfa repeated musingly, thinking of the words of the missionary teacher in Guadalajara, who had also spoken gravely of "the truth." What was the truth ?

"Luz, I used to be afraid of the *protestantes*," Ninfa said earnestly. "One of them spoke to me once at home, and gave me a card with words printed on it which she said were 'the truth.' But it was not what grandmother and I believe. I am not so much afraid of them as I used to be, now that I know you so well, but there are many things I do not understand. Now why do they teach that the Holy Virgin is not the mother of God ?"

"Do you mean to ask if the Protestants teach



that Mary was not Jesus Christ's mother, Ninfa? But they do teach that she was his mother. How could you have heard anything else? Of course God has no mother, because he has always lived, before men and women were created, but Mary was the mother of his Son, when he came into this world as a man, as a little baby."

"Maria told me a lie then," Ninfa said with flashing eyes. "Perhaps some of the other things she said were lies too." Suddenly her mood changed, and her earnestness gave way to playfulness and mock fear. "Oh! oh!" she cried, "I have just thought about it! Justo told me to beware of wolves, for I was just a little innocent lamb. I am afraid you are a wolf, Lucita, and I must run away, or you will eat me up. Catch me if you can!"

The laughing girl sprang to her feet as she spoke, and ran toward the dormitory, leaving Lucita to gather up the comb and brush and follow or not, as she pleased.

Her heart was heavy as she slowly crossed the court, bent upon completing her task of hair-dressing. Why could she not let this foolish girl go her own way without such an ache coming into her own heart? What was the meaning of her strange yearning over the child and the unselfish love inspired by Ninfa since the first day of their acquaintance?

## V

MORE than three quarters of a century before the time of this story, the foundations of the "Old Temple" were just being laid opposite the *plaza* of San Francisco. Slowly its walls rose above the solid foundation stones, the country people for leagues around Saltillo being required by the priests to bring with them material for building every time they entered the city. After five years of work, more or less spasmodic, those who had the matter in hand grew tired of building, and the unfinished church was left to the mercy of the sun, rain, and wind for many years. Some who saw it at this stage, even after fifty years of neglect, tell in glowing terms of the beauty of its classic style, and of the marvelous carving of the *façade*.

Though simply in a state of "arrested development," the "Old Temple" ere long acquired the appearance of a roofless ruin, and came to be considered as such by the town. About the time of the purchase of the Montez property for the establishment of the girls' boarding school, the unfinished "Old Temple" also attracted the eye of those interested in the school.

By this time all the church property of Mexico

belonged to the government, in accordance with the edict of confiscation of 1857, introduced by President Juarez, and under the Mexican law which forbids the city or State to hold property unimproved for public use, they were able to effect the purchase of the "Old Temple." It was the intention of the purchasers to rejuvenate and complete the substantial old building and convert it into a Protestant temple for the worship of God. The beauty and solidity of its walls were beyond criticism, and its situation was all that could be desired. It fronted the leafy *plaza* of San Francisco on its eastern side, with the Catholic Church of San Francisco as its only neighbor. The southern side of the *plaza* was occupied by the long, low walls of the State College, while on the west and north residences of the middle class were its boundaries.

The satisfaction of the agents of the mission who had accomplished the purchase, was not allowed to continue uninterrupted. After the purchase money had been paid, and work was about to begin on the building, "a corrupt judge put an 'injunction' on the disturbance of the old walls. . . Month after month, and year after year, obstacles were put in the way of a settlement and the injunction was unremoved." Finally the agent employed by the Board of Missions "resolved, as the injunction was against 'demolishing the walls,' to build his church inside of the walls, the area being

capacious enough for two such edifices, and a beautiful building was erected, only the spire appearing above the lofty walls of the 'old temple.' This was a queer sight, and turned a popular laugh against the unjust and foolish judge. . . . The governor was disgusted with the court and finally became indignant. He also devised in favor of the truth and right. He proclaimed the old walls a 'nuisance,' and 'condemned' them as such. The next day by sunrise, sixty men were on the walls with picks and shovels, by order of the government. That was a happy day for the little church of Saltillo."<sup>1</sup>

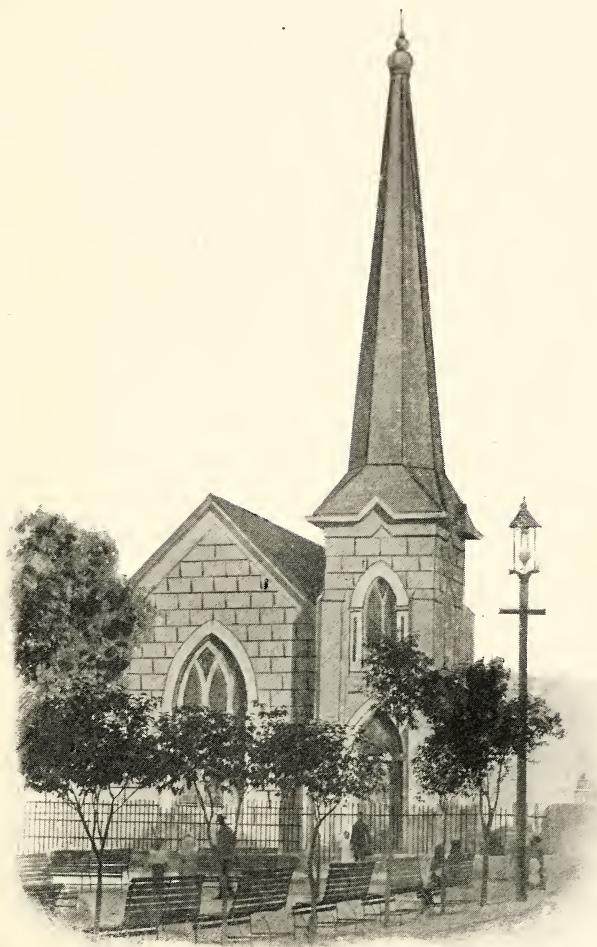
The fine old walls were soon leveled, leaving "the gem of a church, free from its bondage, glittering in the sunlight and adorning the San Francisco *plaza*." Thereupon the public statement was made that "the case was dismissed from court because of lack of subject."

The little Protestant congregation had already been worshiping for four or five years in their comfortable church home, when Lucita Rubio first led Ninfa, the Roman Catholic girl, to a seat within its walls.

Several rooms in the rear of the church were now used as a mission school for boys, in charge of the pastor of the church, assisted by a Mexican

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<sup>1</sup> See "A Decade of Foreign Missions," by H. A. Tupper, D. D., for history of this building.



“ ‘The gem of a church.’ ”

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preacher. Here three or four young men were in active preparation for the ministry. These youths occupied seats together on the "men's side" of the church, and on this particular Sunday morning their spines straightened, rounded shoulders were lowered, heads slightly turned toward the aisle, and eyes perceptibly brightened, as a measured tramp of feet nearing the vestibule in the tower announced the advent of the institute girls.

The little girls led the way, two by two, accompanied by the Señorita Julia, and these proceeded in good order toward the front benches and took their allotted seats. Next came the middle-sized girls with Señorita Dora, and after small flutters and nudgings, as became middle-sized girls, they disposed themselves in seats back of the younger ones. The large girls came last, attended by the director's wife and a Mexican woman employed as supervisor at the school. Lucita and Ninfa were among these last, and found places on one side near the organ, over which one of the ladies presided during the song service.

On entering the seat Lucita turned her head just in time to see Ninfa deliberately kneel in the aisle and cross herself devoutly before following her into the pew. A ripple of amusement passed from one girl to another, in the immediate neighborhood, but Ninfa had no idea that the smiles she

saw as she took her seat were caused by her innocent act of devotion. Lucita's face burned with annoyance, but she said nothing to Ninfa, who was gazing, wide-eyed, at the empty walls and altarless platform. Where the altar should have been was only a plain table, covered with a red cloth, and a stout, splint-bottomed chair occupied by the pastor.

The burst of music from all these young throats, led by the organ, was presently almost drowned by the crashing of the bells in the church towers of San Francisco, next door. But the singing was repeated again and again, at intervals, long after the bells had ceased their clamor. The seats in the *plaza*, opposite the church, were often filled at this hour by those who seemed to delight in the melodies borne to them from behind the great, stained-glass window in the *façade* of the church, but who would not dare to cross the threshold of the tower entrance.

Ninfa was too much interested in all she heard and saw to grow tired of the double service of Sunday-school and sermon, and on the way home she was full of questions for the patient Lucita.

Teresa and the baby had not appeared at church that morning, and Lucita was conscious of the slightest feeling of relief, mingled with her disappointment, on this account. She felt somehow that she must prepare Ninfa for her mother, and for the poor little brother. She was not ashamed



of them—no, indeed, she loved them too well for that—but she was not yet sure that Ninfa would think so much of her if she should be brought to really comprehend her friend's true station. Lucita had more than once told Ninfa that she was a poor girl, and not born to associate with one of her rank, and had been laughed at for her pains, yet her communication had been received in too light a manner to assure her of Ninfa's perfect comprehension of the case.

When the Sunday dinner was over, there was an hour or so allowed the girls for lounging in undress inside the dormitories if they wished to rest. Several, meanwhile, received their relatives in the parlor, and others promenaded the corridor chatting or singing.

Lucita lay down to rest her back, which was not strong, now that she was growing so tall and slim, and Ninfa lolled in the doorway nearest their end of the room. The other occupants of the dormitory were asleep or away. Lucita was on the brink of a doze when she heard Ninfa speaking in a hushed voice to some one outside the door.

"Yes, Lucita is in here," Ninfa was saying, "but can you not leave your message with me? She is tired and asleep."

"Thank you, señorita," the other replied in a voice well known to Lucita. "I will just sit down here and wait till she wakes. Do not fear; the

baby will make no noise. My Lucita will be glad to find us here when she wakes."

Lucita lay like a stone, devoid of sense and motion, yet her eyes were open when Ninfa bent over her bed.

"Have you waked?" Ninfa whispered. "There is a poor woman out on the corridor who wants to see you. I think she may be a beggar, Luz, but she calls you her Lucita. Shall I tell her to go away and not bother you? I have some *centavos* in my pocket and I will give them to the little baby in her arms. That will satisfy her, and you can go to sleep again."

"No, do not send her away, Ninfa," Lucita said, with a strange tightening of her throat. "I will see her, of course." She rose to her feet and stood looking at Ninfa with all the color gone from her face.

"You are sick, Luz, lie down again," Ninfa urged. "The woman can wait. She has a good face and is as clean as possible; why should she not come in here to you, if you insist upon seeing her?"

"It is against the rules for us to see visitors in our rooms, Ninfa." Then, with a change in her voice, Lucita exclaimed: "I am not sick, but I am a coward, Ninfa Barreda. Come out with me to see my mother. It is she who is out there with my *hermanito*. Come, Ninfa."

The two girls soon stood before the tired woman who had seated herself on the stones of the corridor, with Pepito wrapped in her faded *rebozo*.

"*Mamá*, I am so glad!" Lucita exclaimed, honestly enough now, and slipped down to a seat beside Teresa. "I missed you at church this morning."

Then she learned that Don Luis had been in too much pain for Teresa to leave him in the morning, but that he had dispatched her for news of their daughter as soon as the pains had lessened. Teresa had been too timid to knock at the iron gates and dreaded to enter the great parlor where visitors were already gathered, so she had slipped in through the half-opened gates and, finding the inner doors unlocked, had inquired her way to Lucita's dormitory. This was her first formal visit to her daughter, as the helplessness of her husband rarely allowed her to leave home for so long a trip.

Ninfa had taken in the situation with much more ease than might have been expected. Up to the time of her arrival at the school she had been accustomed to the lower classes of society in the capacity of *peons*, or as servants on her grandmother's estate, but even among these she had had companions at play during the years spent at the *hacienda*. Her week's acquaintance with the democratic spirit of this school had still further

broadened her sympathies in this direction, and after the first slight shock of realizing that the aristocratic-looking Luz was in truth the daughter of a poor woman, she wondered no more over the discovery.

"Let me hold the little bit of a baby," she pleaded, as Lucita took Pepito from her mother's arms. "I have never had a real baby in my arms. Thank you, señora, and is he not sweet? Look, Luz, he is smiling at me and trying to talk." The girl was as delighted as a child over a new doll, and had such a motherly little way about her that Teresa was charmed.

Luz stepped inside to find a mat for her mother to sit upon, and Teresa seized the opportunity to ask for the name of her daughter's "pretty little friend."

"Oh, I am not pretty," Ninfa laughed; "at least not half so pretty as Luz. My name is Ninfa Barrera."

"What!" Teresa exclaimed. "*What* is your *apellido*?"<sup>1</sup>

"Barrera," Ninfa repeated. "I do not think it is a common name here. I come from the south, from Guadalajara."

"Ah, from Guadalajara? I have known Barreras myself, owners of *haciendas* in the country; but you cannot be one of them, señorita?"

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<sup>1</sup> Family name.

"Why not?" Ninfa asked. "My grandfather was a ranch owner, and sometimes even now we go to El Dorado for a visit, though my grandmother likes Guadalajara best, now that I am growing up. There now, baby, do not fret. See, I shall walk about with you and let you smell the white roses and see the pretty doves drinking at the fountain, and listen to the tinkle of the water. No, no, Luz, let me keep him a little while, and you and your mother can have a quiet talk together."

She kissed the tips of her fingers to Lucita and hurried off with the baby proudly clasped in her arms, toward a knot of girls about the fountain.

"What is the matter, *mamá*?" Lucita asked, seating herself on the reed mat, to which she had induced her mother to move. "Why do you look so strangely after Ninfa? You may trust the baby with her, I am sure."

"Is she a good girl, Lucita?" Teresa asked in a strained voice.

"Yes, good and sweet."

"Yet she must be rich; all the Barredas are, and proud also. Is she proud, Lucita?"

"Perhaps," Lucita answered a little unwillingly.

"That does not look like it," the woman went on, her eyes still following Ninfa, who was exhibiting the baby's charms of finger and toe to the circle about her. "She says that she is a Barreda. How old is she, Lucita?"

"Just about my age, *mamá*," Lucita answered, surprised at this catechism from her mother. "But tell me more about *papá* now. You know it has been a week since I have seen him. If he does not get better I shall ask permission to go home this week and pay you a visit some afternoon."

"Bring the Señorita Ninfa with you, if you come," was the mother's strange request. "Has she been here long, Lucita? You have never mentioned her name to me."

"She is a new girl, *mamá*, and I do not understand why she should interest you so much."

"Has she father and mother, Lucita?" the questions continued, as if urged from Teresa's lips by some power beyond herself.

By degrees, therefore, Teresa learned all of Ninfa's history which was known to the young girl herself.

"The little sister who died while her mother was away from home, was named Luz," Lucita exclaimed at the end with a shy smile of pleasure; "so that is one reason why Ninfa loves me. There is another Luz here, but she is so little that Ninfa says she cannot even imagine that she is her sister. Sometimes, *mamá*, we pretend that we are sisters, twin-sisters—only think of it!—and Ninfa says she wishes it were really true."

"She has been here only one week, and you have grown so intimate as that?" Teresa asked in

a hard, unnatural voice. "Take care, Lucita, some day one of her proud relatives will come who may not be so easy and good-tempered as her father was; then all your friendship will be broken up and the girl will forget that she has ever known you."

"Her father, *mamá*? What can you know of her father, who died when she was a baby, and in the south too?"

"I knew him," the mother faltered, with a flush on her thin cheeks. "We lived in the south when you were born, you know," she added, rising hastily as she spoke and going to meet Ninfa who approached with the baby.

She did not linger long after this and Lucita was troubled at her mother's unusual discomposure of manner. It seemed as if Ninfa's face and figure had a fascination for Teresa, for her eyes continually fastened themselves upon her as the young girl accompanied Lucita and the visitors to the gates.

"I wish I had a little brother like that," Ninfa said, leaning upon Lucita's arm as they watched the woman leave the garden.

"I think *mamá* is not well this afternoon," Lucita confided to Ninfa, as they returned to the dormitory. "She is generally very cheerful and happy. I fear my *papá* is growing worse, and *mamá* has much work to do."

"You are richer than I am, Luz," Ninfa whispered. "You have a *papá* and a *mamá* and a

brother, while I have nobody but my grandmother. But I do not know how it would be to be poor as you say you are," she added candidly. "I do not think I should like it very well, even with a mother and little brother."

Meanwhile Teresa was torturing herself with the question :

"Ought Lucita to be told? After all our care, do we not deserve to enjoy what God has given us for the rest of our lives? Yet perhaps she ought to be told. I will ask Luis."



## VI

“**W**HAT ails you, woman?” Luis Rubio asked sharply, as Teresa sat moodily in the doorway after her return from the institute. “You said the walk down to the school would do you good. Instead, it seems to have made you deaf and dumb. Don’t you hear the baby crying? He waked as soon as you laid him on the bed.”

Teresa rose and brought the fretting child out into the air, and spent several moments in soothing him. Then, while Pepito lay on her lap sucking his thumb and gazing vacantly at the bright colors of the sky, the wife spoke, as if with difficulty.

“Ah, Luis, you will be sorry to hear what I have to say when once I open my mouth,” she said, looking away from her husband’s perplexed face.

“You said that Lucita was well,” Luis replied. “What bad news can you have possibly brought from the school, then, if naught ails the girl? Were any stones thrown at the church to-day? I am always fearing for the beautiful window in front, notwithstanding the wire netting. Did anything happen this morning?”

“A new scholar has come to the school, Luis,” Teresa said; “and she——”

"More good news," Luis interrupted. "The more the better, I say, and if they grow too crowded, we will have Lucita at home to sleep——" His wife's discomposed face interrupted him in his turn. "Go on, woman," he said impatiently. "What of the new scholar?"

"She comes from the south, from the *hacienda* of El Dorado, near Guadalajara, and her name is Ninfa Barreda," was the impressive reply.

For a brief second Luis stared the woman in the face, then his head drooped upon his breast.

"Will you tell the girl—our Lucita?" he asked presently, in feeble tones.

"I do not know; you must decide, Luis. Why should we alter things? Lucita is happy, and as you know the Barredas are proud and overbearing. At least," Teresa added, after a moment's reflection, "Doña Alejandra was said to be so, and it is she alone who lives now, and Don Vicente's daughter, the child whom I saw this afternoon, is in her sole charge."

Silence fell between the husband and wife after this. Pepito's thumb gradually slipped from his wee mouth, as he slept, and darkness settled around them. A struggle was going on in the hearts of Luis and Teresa as the moments passed.

For several years, ever since their feet had begun to follow the true Way, their consciences had suffered more or less on Lucita's account. Now a

crucial point seemed to be reached. A mere silence on their part would allow their simple lives to proceed without distressing change and renunciation. A few spoken words might rend asunder the happy family life growing more and more centered in Lucita's cleverness and her loving cheer.

A motto was pinned on the dingy wall opposite the stool where Luis sat, a home-made affair, brought from school one day by Lucita. The white card had letters cut from gilt paper pasted upon it, and the letters formed the question, in Spanish, "What would Jesus do?"

It was too dark now for even the card to be seen, in the shadow of the hall, but Don Luis presently raised his eyes toward its place, from a kind of habit he had of consulting the words upon it.

"What do you think *he* would do about it, Teresita?" he asked.

"Of course the Christ would always do the right thing," Teresa replied impatiently. "I am tired of having that card on the wall, Luis, and I wish Lucita had not brought it here."

"You thought it beautiful, at first, Teresa."

"So I did, but it is fly-specked now. How can I keep any white thing clean in this house? I noticed yesterday that the letters were peeling off too. I'll take it down to-morrow and put it in the box to keep for Lucita."

"What would be 'the right thing,' Teresa?" Luis asked, taking no notice of his wife's petulance. He was sorry for Teresa and sorry for himself. There was no reply. "Suppose you tell the señoritas about it," he added. "They are wise, and love Lucita."

Teresa nodded her head as if in consent, and then rose abruptly, declaring that it was high time to close the doors, as the night air was too cool for her husband's bones.

In her heart she realized that the advice of Luis was good. It seemed really too great a question to be answered by themselves alone. If the Señorita Julia agreed with her, Lucita need not be told, and she was rather sure of making a strong story in her own behalf. Of course both she and Luis wished to do "the right thing," always, now that they loved Jesus and had promised to obey him as well as they could. Yet days, and then weeks, and even months passed, and the Señorita Julia heard nothing of the perplexity and unrest of the Rubios.

"*Mañana*<sup>1</sup> I will go," Teresa would say to herself and to Luis.

But there was always something else to do *mañana*, and Luis had not the heart to insist upon her going. Surely there could be no hurry, while as yet the school term was not half gone.

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<sup>1</sup> To-morrow.

School work went steadily on, during the summer months. The sun was hot and the days were long, but the thick stone walls of the institute excluded all heat, while the wide corridor encircling the building on the inner court was always airy with vagrant breezes and puffs of wind.

Ninfa was not long in recommending herself to her teachers, for, though she was not particularly clever, her rearing had been that of a lady, and she was obedient to them and thoughtful of their wishes. Each day the little "blue geography" told her something that she had never known before. From her foreign teachers she learned to understand the map of Mexico, and it was not long before she knew the names and capitals of its twenty-seven states, and their boundaries. She had found that she must wait a year before beginning the study of Mexican history, but from the señoritas she heard much about President Diaz, his wisdom in government, and his good intentions toward the Mexican people.

Of course there were classes for spelling and reading also, and Ninfa could not help being interested in the little tales given in "Appleton's Second Reader," in Spanish, though she was a great girl of seventeen. Arithmetic proved a bugbear, and the Señorita Julia had sad times over the private lessons necessary for Ninfa's instruction in the mysteries of long division. Ninfa was disposed, at times, to be

indignant at what proved to be expected of her in arithmetic. Was she, a girl who already had a lover, to be forever reviewing the multiplication table? Could it possibly make so very much difference whether *siete por sies* were *cuarenta y dos*, or *cuarenta y nueve*?<sup>1</sup> It was very tiresome. Lucita secretly, yet thoroughly, sympathized with Ninfa upon this subject. In this one study alone she was behind all her class, and had not yet been promoted to the director's class in algebra. Yet she was able to untangle many a knot for Ninfa during the afternoons out of school, and her own knowledge of arithmetic was not lessened by this exercise.

Simple lessons in English were given Ninfa by the Señorita Dora, at odd moments during the morning, as it was not possible to introduce the new pupil into a class which had been at work on the language for almost three months. This study became, next to her music, Ninfa's joy and pride. Columbus discovering the new worlds could not have experienced livelier sensations of delight and awe, than did Ninfa upon being assured that the señorita actually understood her meaning, when, after careful preparation, she had timidly propounded the question: "Where is the cat?" in English. The teacher's reply had been: "I am sure I have no idea, Ninfa," and the girl had been

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<sup>1</sup> Whether seven times six were forty-two or forty-nine.

deeply chagrined at not understanding what had seemed so simple a reply! Even her own name had sounded unfamiliar when spoken in the English tongue.

Besides her music lesson three times a week, there were long hours of practising in one of the music rooms, yet they never seemed long to Ninfa.

Life within the institute walls was busy indeed for the seventy-five girls gathered there, not to speak of the teachers, who did their part. But there were hours of play as well as hours of work, when the corridors echoed with laughter and snatches of song, when racing feet and shrill voices told of games of "hide-and-seek," or "drop the handkerchief," and others whose names are unknown in the language in which this tale is written.

May, June, July, and August passed away, and September came with cold nights and mornings, though the heat of the sun at midday was still sickening to those who exposed themselves to it.

On a Sunday afternoon in September, Lucita and Ninfa, with other girls of the same age, gathered for a Sunday talk with the Señorita Julia in her pleasant room opening upon the street.

Opportunities to visit the teachers' rooms were highly appreciated by the pupils, for these apartments represented a different world and civilization from their own. There were certain loyal ones among the girls who were stanch in their prefer-

ence for the Señorita Dora's room, with its cool, green light from the tinted walls, and its dark furniture of walnut, its books and its pictures. Others declared warmly for the sunnier room of the Señorita Julia, with its wide, glass doors closing the window, instead of the heavy, solid shutters of the other windows of the building. Here there were gay walls, blue striped, with pink roses between, and the furniture was of polished oak. The large mirror, the wide, soft bed, the books and pictures here also, and the wicker rocking-chair, were all novelties, even to the well-bred Ninfa, accustomed to metal bedsteads without springs, and rockerless chairs.

When the girls had bestowed themselves on chairs, trunk, and matting, the señorita was about to close the glass doors and so partially shut out the sights and sounds of the street, directly outside, when a dark-eyed boy addressed her from the sidewalk. He stood for several moments before speaking, grasping the window bars with his hands, and gazing boldly at each object that met his glance inside. He was a ragged little fellow, dressed in soiled shirt and trousers of white cotton, and wearing a broken straw hat on his rough black head, and sandals on his feet.

"Buy my chocolate, señora?" he asked, taking up a small covered tray from the ground at his feet. "My mother made it, and it is good."



"No, child, I cannot buy your chocolate to-day," the señorita answered, pausing, however, with a smile in the act of closing the window. "Bring me some to-morrow and I will take it."

The boy shrugged his shoulders. Ninfa jingled some cents in her pocket and looked lovingly at the crisp, brown squares offered by the boy, but Lucita shook her head at her.

"It will be all sold by to-morrow," he said. "Why not take it to-day? It will save me more walking and the señoritas wish some. It is very pure, señora."

"To-day is Sunday, my dear. I never buy anything on Sunday," the teacher said, still lingering at the window.

"One must eat on Sundays as well as on other days," the child replied quickly. "Why not chocolate as well as anything else? Well, *adios*, señora, you will be sorry when I am gone." Showing his teeth in a brilliant smile, the boy shuffled farther along the street, not failing to tap at each of the other windows of the institute as he passed.

"Will he sell it, señorita?" Ninfa asked, with interest, as the teacher closed the window and stepped down from the low window seat into the room.

"Oh, yes, to some one, of course, for it is very good chocolate," was the reply. "I have frequently bought it from his little sister. I know his

mother, and it is, as he says, made by her, and good and pure. Did you want some, Ninfa?"

"Ninfa likes our chocolate very much," Arcadia replied for Ninfa. "She says she never sees any just like it at her home."

Thereupon the señorita took down a blue china plate from a shelf, and opening a drawer in the bureau, produced a paper bag filled with squares of the delicious sweet. She filled the plate, and then offered it to the half-dozen girls who had watched her movements with interest.

"I saw the woman grind the cacao beans to make this very chocolate," she said, "and as I selected the beans myself at the store, I think you will find it very nice."

After some polite demurring the plate was ere long nearly emptied, and all the girls sat nibbling.

"I too like to have something good to eat on Sunday afternoons," the señorita said, smiling into the almost empty plate as it reached her hands again. "When I was a little girl, my mother always had some kind of 'Sunday treat' for me. Now that I am grown up and need the money for so many other things, I do not often spend it on sweets like this. How fortunate that you girls should have happened in this afternoon, when there really was a 'Sunday treat' on hand!"

"But you know we did not know it, señorita," Lucita said deprecatingly.

"We wanted to talk to you about something," another girl added.

"That is, we wanted her to talk to us, Angela," Arcadia corrected her.

"Ninfa asked us a question this morning, after we came from church," Lucita explained, "and we could not answer her very well. So we thought we would come to you."

"Did you bring your Bibles then?" the señorita asked quickly.

"Why, no," Angela Vera replied. "I do not believe there is anything about this in the Bible."

"No, señorita," Lucita said gravely, "I think questions like this were not troubling people in those days."

"In what days?" Señorita Julia asked.

"In those old days, when Jesus was a man, and Peter and Paul preached to the people," Lucita replied for the rest. "There were not any Roman Catholic priests then, señorita?"

"There were priests certainly, though they were not Roman Catholics. Let me hear Ninfa's question—no, first all go and get your Bibles, and then Ninfa herself shall ask her question over again."

## VII

“THERE! You are back again, every one. That is good,” the señorita exclaimed, as the girls bustled in again. “I thought I would give any one of you the opportunity to stay away if she liked. What, Ninfa! You have no Bible? Could you not borrow one?”

Ninfa hung her head for a second, then looked up brightly into the teacher’s face.

“I would like to use the little brown book you have, señorita, if you will lend it to me; the one having a crucifix on the cover.”

“My little Roman Catholic Testament?” the señorita asked in some surprise. “Certainly, you may have that one if you prefer it. I was going to use it myself but shall be glad to see it in your hands instead. It is much like the other editions, Ninfa, and I am particularly glad for you girls to learn just what it teaches on the question you have in mind. Understand that I have as yet no idea as to what that question is. What have you been puzzling my girls about, Ninfa Barreda?” The question was asked playfully, but there was earnest interest in the señorita’s heart.

“Señorita, it is such a very little thing that I do

not understand why a fuss should be made about it by the girls," Ninfa answered. "I wanted to know why the Protestants do not have priests like ours, that is all."

"You know, señorita, we have been reviewing our *historia patria* this week, and you have told us a great deal about the old Aztec religion and the priests and the sacrifices," Lucita interposed.

"And in our missionary society we learn about the priests in China and Japan," Arcadia added eagerly, "and it does seem as if everybody but the Protestants have priests."

A sweet-faced girl named Angela Vera spoke next, yet more shyly than the rest. "The lesson at Sunday-school to-day was about the chief priests in Jerusalem," she said. "You know they were enemies of Jesus."

"Why were they his enemies, Angela?" the señorita asked softly.

"Because he did not teach the people as they did?" Angela replied tentatively.

"I believe," the señorita said slowly and thoughtfully, "that you will find on examination that all priests who claim to be more than human guides of their people and who trust in any other authority than God for the spiritual aid they are able to give, are false teachers, and as such are enemies of Christ, who is God."

Ninfa looked perplexed, and idly turned the

leaves of the little book she held in her hand. It was a copy of the New Testament with notes, published in London in 1847. The frontispiece was a representation of the Saviour standing with uplifted finger pointing to the sky. In the background were the walls and towers of a city. Three crosses were pictured on a hill near by, and underneath the whole was printed :

“Truly this is the Saviour of the world.”

The last leaves of the book were given up to a subject index, by means of which the student might find references, giving authority for, “baptism,” “spiritual joy,” “adoration of images,” “transubstantiation,” and other religious exercises.

This book had accompanied the señorita on many a visit from house to house in the city. The actual sacred text was almost identical with that of the other versions, and ignoring the human comments and interpretations subjoined, the señorita had often found that there were those who would listen to this version, authorized by Pope Pius VI., through his “Latin secretary,”<sup>1</sup> who would not dare to allow the Protestants’ Bible an entrance to their homes.

After turning the leaves of her own Bible for a moment or two, the señorita asked the girls to find certain verses in the seventh, eighth, and ninth chapters of the letter to the Hebrews. She herself

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix III., for translation of the Pope’s letter.

found the places for Ninfa, and the girl was surprised to notice whole paragraphs in these chapters heavily marked by pen and ink.

"You see, Ninfa, yours is a question that has been asked before," the señorita said. "Now listen while Lucita reads the verses as I shall call for them."

For a whole hour there was quiet in the room, broken only by the murmur of low voices, in reading or in explanation and argument. Ninfa listened to every word with an interest which deepened as the discussion proceeded. She wished her grandmother could have heard what the señorita was saying, and she wondered why there was no New Testament like this at home. Justo must certainly own a Bible, if he were a priest; and yet this Bible seemed to be teaching that a new order of things had come about since Christ's life on earth and his death, and it really appeared that there was no further need of priests to offer masses for the living and dead. As to the money offerings exacted of penitents, not to speak of the actual shedding of blood in some of the acts of penance, according to the señorita these things were all out of date, as well as wrong.

She wondered if there were Roman Catholics where the Americans came from, and if they had priests and believed in purgatory.

Poor Justo, a priest for nothing! How badly

he would feel to know his mistake! Yet why should he be mistaken, with the Bible as free to every one as the señorita said it really was?

For the first time the thought came this afternoon to Ninfa, that Padre Manuel and her grandmother might be wrong in their idea that the Bible was a book hard to be understood and not fit for the young and ignorant to read. It seemed to her to be written in very plain language, and she had no difficulty in understanding the words after once spelling them out. It was true that the little book in which she was reading was printed in very small type, but Lucita's was different, and Ninfa was sure that with such a book she would be able to understand much more of it than just the pretty stories and simple verses she was growing accustomed to hear read each day at morning prayers. The señorita too talked very plainly, and it was easy for Ninfa and the other girls, some of whom were also Roman Catholics, to understand about the old idea of satisfying the wrath of a just God by sacrifices in his name. They pitied the innocent lambs offered so frequently for the sins of the Hebrew nation, and shuddered at the hints of human sacrifices, presided over, even now, by priests of heathen nations, who have never heard of a loving God.

While the señorita talked about the priests of old times, and their position as mediators between some offended god and his sinning people, and



then spoke earnestly of the one great sacrifice of God's Son for the sin of the whole world, it seemed to Ninfa that the book in her hand told the simple truth, that there was no more need for sacrifice for sin, by priest or people. Did not the words say: "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them"?

Then the next verses were plainer still: "For such a high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens: who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the people's, for this he did once when he offered up himself."

The señorita had said that the high priests mentioned here were Jewish priests, of course, who did not believe in Jesus Christ as God's Son and the world's Saviour, as Roman Catholic priests believe.

"Yet what need have we now of such priests as these we see on the streets every day?" she asked. "Our 'high priest' has not withdrawn his intercession from us, but 'ever liveth' to fulfill his office of mediator. We have him still, the 'mediator of the new covenant.' "

Then the Christ and his offering of himself, according to the señorita's doctrine, had taken the

place of the priests and their sacrifices of bulls and of lambs and goats.

Ninfa felt Lucita's wistful eyes upon her as she was called on to read a few verses farther on. She stumbled in the reading, but the señorita waited in patience till the end was reached. Angela Vera had read of the tabernacle, and of the holy of holies into which the high priest alone might enter, and that but once a year, after sacrifices of animals for his own and the people's sins, and the señorita had said that this was very simply explained as being only a shadow, or a type, of some better way to be shown later. Ninfa therefore read what followed, how Christ through his own blood, had now once for all obtained eternal redemption:

"For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifieth unto the purifying of the flesh; how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"

"But you have preachers to teach the people, as our priests do," Carmen Diaz objected. "How are people to know all this about Jesus Christ if there is no one to tell them?"

"The *monjas* taught me before I came here," little Luz exclaimed; "but it was almost all about the Virgin and the saints."

"Our catechism does teach that Jesus Christ is God's Son, señorita," Carmen continued; "and I want to know what we would do without the priests, because after all, Christ has gone to heaven, as this book says. He may be interceding for us, but we cannot see him and cannot be sure that he hears us."

"And this Bible says that it was right at one time to have priests and altars and candlesticks in the churches, señorita," Angela Vera suggested.

Lucita was silent, but watchful, and Ninfa was anxious to hear the señorita's reply to all these objections.

Then she heard how the Saviour himself had commanded those who had learned of him to go and tell the whole world about his teachings and to try to bring every one to a true knowledge of himself, and if priests would confine themselves to teaching the simple truth of the Bible about the Master and his salvation, they would be doing God's work indeed. If, however, any priest or preacher in the world should dare to teach that repentance for sins, and confession, should be offered to God by the sinner through himself as intercessor between the sinning one and the Saviour, such a man would be taking to himself rights belonging to Christ alone.

"And is it not thus with your priests, Carmen?" the señorita asked. "Do they not often put themselves, the saints, Mary, good works, penance,

almsgiving, between a poor sin-stricken soul and the loving Saviour? Has not a repentant man, under such circumstances, a long and difficult way to tread before he may be assured of forgiveness and reinstatement from Jesus? Hear what my Bible, and yours also, says : ' Now, once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.'

"Why is there need for any more sacrifice, for the scourging with the *disciplina*, for the wearing one's self out with long kneeling on damp floors of churches, of hurting one's self in any way, when the Lord himself is so near to each repentant heart that a simple longing for his presence is all that is needed to bring him closer, and confession to him alone what he requires? No priest is needed between any man's soul and the Saviour, and I think what we have been reading very clearly proves this."

"Did Christ say all this?" Ninfa asked, laying her hand over the page of the letter to the Hebrews lying open upon her lap.

"No. One of the Christians who worked after Jesus ascended to heaven, wrote this letter to the Christian Jews, when some were falling away from faith in Christ, troubled by men who taught false doctrines, contrary to the Master's."

"I suppose this is the truth," the girl said wistfully.

"Yes, indeed," the señorita replied smiling. "Ninfa, do you feel as if your question had been answered? There is a great deal more that we might read about this, but I see that it is almost time for the supper bell to ring."

"I cannot understand how so many people can be wrong," Ninfa answered; "but I do think it must be as you say, señorita, and perhaps some day there will be no more priests in Mexico. I would like to talk with my grandmother about it."

"Poor child, I am afraid your grandmother would not agree with what this Bible teaches us, Ninfa."

"Oh, but that is because she has never read it. May I buy a Bible, señorita?"

"To-morrow I will let you see the different kinds we have, dear child, and you shall choose one for yourself, with large print and strong covers."

As the girls went out through the anteroom separating the señorita's room from the corridor, Lucita lingered behind a moment.

"Señorita Julia," she said, laying her hand for a moment against the teacher's shoulder, "I do not know why it makes me both glad and sorry to have Ninfa ask for a Bible. But, oh, is it not good that you and I do not need a priest to bring us near to Jesus? My *papá* often talks about it, and how the priest used to seem like a great black mantle hiding the Christ from him. That was after he had

begun to go to hear the *protestantes* talk and sing, a long while ago."

"Lucita must be careful that she does not hide the Christ from any one," was the tender reply. "Lead the little questioning soul of Ninfa as near him as you can, my child, but do not get in between and shut out the light. Remember your name, 'Light,' and let it shine very clearly in his name, and then you will be truly serving him."

Lucita walked soberly away to join Ninfa, who was waiting for her at the outer door. The supper bell was ringing noisily, and all the corridor was alive with footsteps and voices.

Ninfa clung to Lucita's arm as they walked toward the dining room. Her thoughts were filled with her grandmother and Justo. Within herself, she decided that she would buy the Bible first and then write home about it. Perhaps it would so please her *mamá* to hear of her improvement in reading that she would not object to the new book's being a Bible. And Padre Justo? Well, he had warned her, and thus done his duty. He had nothing to do with her, after all, as her grandmother had very truly said.

"Lucita," she whispered, "do you think the Virgin Mother will be very angry if I believe what the man wrote about Jesus Christ in the Bible? She is his mother, and would like me to know the truth about him, I should think."

"She will be glad, Ninfa," was the whispered response.

They were late and took their seats after the blessing had been asked, but no notice was taken of their tardiness by the busy teachers presiding over the tables.

Buns and thick sticks of sugar candy were served at the end of the Sunday evening meal, and even Ninfa could find no fault with such toothsome fare.

## VIII

CARMEN DIAZ had not been so easily convinced of the truth of the señorita's reasoning concerning the priestly office as the more childlike and trusting Ninfa had been. Carmen was older, her wits had been sharpened by several terms at the Madero Institute, and she belonged to a family priding itself upon at least one priest for each generation. She enjoyed the discussion of religious matters with the teachers, and often waylaid one of them in the corridor to propound some knotty question for debate. Like Ninfa, she was of a wealthy family who paid her expenses in full, while many of the poorer girls were supported by missionary societies in the United States. Her friends, Arcadia and Angela, were not such ardent Romanists as herself, yet her influence over them was very manifest to those interested in watching their development.

As several girls sat around the fountain that same Sunday evening, Carmen found an audience entirely suited to her tastes. The bell for retiring to the dormitories had not yet rung, and the girls were enjoying the brilliant moonlight, after returning from church service. Ninfa was there and



little Luz also, but Lucita had gone to bed with a headache.

"Did you notice, Angelita, that the señorita spoke about men teaching false doctrines to the Christians?" Carmen asked in a low but triumphant tone. "Now, girls," she added, turning to one or two who had not been present at the discussion in the señorita's room, "I have told you what we read about priests and what the señorita said; how do we know that these *gringos* themselves are not teaching 'false doctrines'? In fact, my grand-uncle, the bishop, says that their teaching is false, and he is angry with my father for sending me here to school. He says that it is like throwing a poor sheep into a wolf's den."

Ninfa started slightly, remembering Justo's words to herself.

"Somebody must know the truth," Angela said thoughtfully.

"Yet our believing one way or the other does not seem to make the truth," Arcadia added. "Now there is Lucita Rubio; she is a Protestant, and some of the girls say it is because she is poor and her parents are ignorant. Yet the señoritas are not poor, and they are certainly very wise and clever."

"Lucita is not ignorant, if her parents are," Angela said quickly. "If I could study as she does, I would be willing to be poor."

Ninfa laid her head affectionately against Angela's shoulder at these words, and their hands clasped under Angela's black shawl.

Carmen's black eyes flashed, and she tossed her head defiantly.

"I do not think Lucita knows any more about religion than the rest of us," she snapped. "Clever as she may be with her books, she is only what her father and mother are in religion. And that is what the rest of us are, I am sure. Unless," she added, with a sly look at Angela, "unless some of us change and think our own better than our parents' brains."

"The señorita told us in our class this morning that our heads have not so much to do with religion as our hearts," Luz spoke up bravely. "She said that a little girl could be a good Christian just as well as the most learned man or woman."

"What is being 'a good Christian,' *chiquita*?" Carmen asked, giving the shawled shoulders of the little girl a playful shake.

"'Loving and obeying Christ,' the señorita said."

Ninfa sighed and wondered if that was what her grandmother understood by the word. She was greatly puzzled at finding good people so divided upon the subject of religion, for she had come to believe that there were good people even among the *protestantes*. Carmen was only adding to her perplexity.

"Well, I shall certainly never be anything but a Roman Catholic," Carmen said, "and that is no reason why I should not be as good a Christian as anybody. Ask your mothers, my dears, and I think they will tell you that there were Christians in Mexico before the *americanos* came to teach their betters. Besides, who wants to give up bull fights and lovely balls? Not I."

The bell for retiring ringing at the moment prevented any reply to Carmen's last words.

"Have you known all about this new religion for a long time, Angelita?" Ninfa asked, as the two girls lingered for a drink of water.

"Oh, yes, for two or three years," Angela replied. "I like it, Ninfa, and some day I mean to join the *protestantes*. I have a beautiful friend who is a *gringa*. She taught me not to pray to Mary and the saints, so I pray only to Christ now instead."

"Nobody taught me that," Ninfa said sorrowfully. "Then are you a Protestant, Angelita?" she asked.

"Not yet," the girl answered slowly. "At least, perhaps in my heart I am, but I cannot declare myself before everybody."

"Are you ashamed?" Ninfa asked in wonder. "I might be afraid if I had to tell my grandmother such a thing of myself, but I do not think I would be ashamed."

"It is the same thing," Angela replied. "Ashamed or afraid, you would find it hard to talk about. My mother would be glad, I believe, but I am thinking of the schoolgirls. I could not bear what Carmen would say."

"Why did not the *americanos* come to Mexico and teach our grandmothers?" Ninfa sighed. "I like their religion best, because I can understand everything they say better than the Latin prayers and hymns the priests use, but I do not see how I can be the only Protestant in the family."

"Girls! girls! did you not hear the bell?" a voice called from a dim corner of the corridor. "Five demerits apiece if you are not in your dormitories in one minute more."

Before school time, the next morning, the Señorita Julia took a few moments for going to the library in search of several Bibles to present for Ninfa's choice later in the day. Not finding the key to the library door in its place in the office, she hurried on to the room, hoping to find it already opened. Such was the case, but she was unprepared for its occupants. She found two gentlemen standing before a large packing case partly filled with Bibles. One of the gentlemen was a missionary, lately returned to the institute from a tour through the State, the other, a Mexican, in the gown and hat of a priest.

As the lady entered, the priest turned toward

her and acknowledged her entrance with a polite salutation. Returning his greeting, she explained in Spanish to the American that she had come for a Bible or two, but would return later, as he was occupied with a visitor.

"I beg that the señorita will not incommode herself," the priest said courteously, standing aside from the box and waving his hand deprecatingly. "It is I who would await the señorita's convenience."

The missionary then assisted the young lady in selecting several Bibles from the box, asking her in English for whom the books were intended.

"For Ninfa Barreda," was the reply. "Of her own accord she has asked to buy one."

Neither saw the start given by the priest, nor the strange expression that flashed across his face, at the distinct mention of Ninfa's name. His smile was there, however, when the others turned from the box, and his manner was as courteous as ever.

"To serve you!" he ejaculated, bowing low in response to the señorita's word of leave-taking, as she went out of the library with the Bibles under her arm. Then he returned to his business with the missionary.

"You have, then, no other books for sale, except the little tracts and the Bibles?" he asked, continuing the conversation begun before the señorita's entrance.

"No others," was the reply.

"I should like a box of the Bibles, if we can agree upon the price," the priest went on, glancing carefully around the room. "I suppose you have many more besides these."

"None at present," the American answered, "except those large ones on the shelves, which we call family Bibles. Of these smaller ones we would not care to sell all to one person, I think."

"Not even if that person should wish to buy them to distribute gratis among his parishioners?" the priest asked, with a shadowy smile.

"No, señor," was the brief reply.

The priest sighed, glancing up and down the half-filled shelves around him.

"You have many books," he remarked. "Your young ladies are allowed to read them, I suppose."

"Certainly. They are gifts from persons interested in our school, and have been sent for the benefit of the pupils."

"That is well," the priest commented, nodding his head approvingly. "And may I ask, do you also allow the señoritas to read the Bible?"

"Assuredly," the missionary replied. "We are very glad for our pupils to become acquainted with the Bible. We find it a wholesome book to put into young girls' hands." This last was said in so confident a tone as to attract the notice of the priest.

"I suppose you make presents of them to the *niñas*," he remarked, stooping over the box of books, and taking one of the Bibles in his hand.

"Oh yes, they are given as prizes in Sunday-school, sometimes. Often, however, the girls like to buy their own, selecting the binding and the type."

"As the girl, the *Señorita Barreda*, will do," the visitor said, turning the leaves of the book with nervous fingers. "Excuse me," he added, with careful politeness; "I merely heard the name mentioned by the *señorita* who was in here a moment ago."

"Then you know English, *señor*?"

"Oh, a very little, so little indeed that even the pronunciation of our Mexican names in the English tongue is barely intelligible to me. To prove this to you, I may say that I failed to understand distinctly the given name of the young lady mentioned by the *señorita*. Was it Luz Barreda, *señor*?"

"No, we have no pupil of that name. There is more than one young lady named Luz, but they are not Barredas."

"Ah, then, I was mistaken. This young lady is perhaps Maria then. They also were mistaken who informed me of the presence here of a *Señorita Luz Barreda*. She is perhaps in attendance at the school of the *monjas* across the street. Pardon my

questions, señor, for I would like to ask one more. This young lady, Maria Barrera, has she no sister here, or cousin perhaps, of the name Barrera?"

"None at all," was the reply. "The Barrera girl is from the far south and has no relatives in the school, nor is her name Maria."

"Ah, then, my questions have troubled you for nothing," the priest replied with a cheerful shrug of the shoulders. "But, señor, is it possible that you will sell me none of your Bibles?" he asked, returning to business for the second time. The missionary gave a searching look into the man's clean-shaven face, and before that look the priest's eyes fell uneasily and he bent lower over the leaves of the Bible open upon his palm. The answer was spoken in a voice as courteous as that of the questioner.

"These Bibles are already appropriated for special uses of our own, señor. In a few weeks, we may expect a new supply; then, if you still desire to secure copies for free distribution among your parishioners, I hope you will call again and allow us to serve you. Meanwhile, will you do me the honor of accepting the volume in your hand as a gift from myself?"

"You are too kind," the priest murmured in some confusion. "I will willingly pay for the book, señor."

"Then you would destroy my pleasure in mak-



ing a gift," the American replied with a smile. "Besides, you might feel that you had the right to 'give away' to some parishioner a purchased Bible, while I trust that you will retain this as a gift and perhaps even read it for the sake of—shall I say, an acquaintance who wishes you well?"

The priest's shoulders were again shrugged expressively, but he hastened to slip the book into some pocket under his gown, and then bowed low over the missionary's offered hand.

"I thank you for the gift," he said with his faint smile wrinkling his face, "but it is I who am honored in receiving so valuable a present. The clergy, to which both you and I belong, whatever the difference in our creeds, are surely one in veneration of the Holy Bible, and I promise you to read it. Your servant, Juan Zarco. *Adios, señor.*"

"*Adios, Señor Zarco,*" the missionary replied, in his turn assuring the priest of his entire submission to his service, and after the interchange of a few more formal compliments, the iron gates closed between them. While the missionary turned away to close the library, the priest stood for a moment on the garden walk beyond the iron gates, and made a leisurely survey of the garden and of the windows opening upon it. Drooping umbrella trees made dark patches of shade upon the grass, and here and there roses bloomed on the sturdy rose trees. Though the grass was luxuriant in

growth and the trees in full leaf, from the constant wetting of little streams of water trickling from an invisible pipe, leaves and grass-blades wore a dingy coat of dust from the unpaved street. The sun was high above the mountains by this time, and its heat was oppressive.

After a glance over the garden and then at the heavily barred and shuttered windows, the priest looked backward into the cool depths of the hall which he had just left. Instead of penetrating the court, with its honeysuckle arch and rose trellis framing a view of the fountain in the midst, his gaze was intercepted by a high and solid partition of wood, built across the farther end of the hall and having a narrow door in the center. He frowned, then turned and walked slowly along the front of the building, and passed out into the street.

A narrow sidewalk bordered the garden and institute on that side, and turning his face toward the rusty dome of the cathedral, lifted against the blue sky, Señor "Juan Zarco" paced meditatively past the windows of the outer tier of rooms, which were so close upon the sidewalk that the priestly gown swept the dust from their iron bars and stone ledges.

Most of the shutters were closed. Behind those of one window he heard the babble of a baby's voice and the splashing of water in a bath. The

sound of a piano came from windows farther on and as the man reached the first of these, opening into one of the music rooms, he found one leaf of the shutters slightly ajar.

An open window in a Mexican street is considered by some persons as an invitation for a passing glance inside. The priest gave more than that as he paused outside of those projecting bars. Not a passer-by was in sight. The windows across the street were closed against the dust. From inside the music room came the clear notes of a piano finger exercise, accompanied by the droning sound of a girl's voice counting, "one, two, three, four," over and over again. No teacher was present, so far as the priest could see within his limited angle of vision.

The light from broad panes of glass set in the upper panels of the shutters fell brightly over the music book on the piano rack and over the girl's head bent slightly over the book.

"It is she, of all others!" the priest muttered to himself. "And if at this hour to-day, why not at the same time to-morrow? I must go to my room and think it out."

With something headlong in his speed, "Señor Zarco" walked rapidly away. He hurried through the narrow lane, frowned down upon by the gloomy wall of the cathedral, bared his head mechanically as he passed the open gates, stumbling blindly over

the outstretched leg of a crippled beggar sunning himself against the wall, and then more slowly mounted a street on the left of the cathedral.

"I have not managed well," he meditated as he ascended the street. "The señora herself would have used more *finesse*. Here am I, branded with a false name at my first encounter with that man of wits, whom of all others I should have preferred to avoid just now. That name was given from a sudden instinct for concealment on my part, yet it was hardly necessary, considering the part I have to play. Under that name I shall not be able to ask for an interview with the *niña*, *valgame Dios* ! She is buying a Bible and passing from under any influence I might have over her. She is young and therefore trustful of those whom she loves, and distrustful of whom she dislikes. The truth about the other *niña* cannot fail to be discovered ere long ; she will act hastily in the matter, and what might have been accomplished by my careful management will be frustrated by the headstrong eagerness of a girl, assisted by the partisanship of the *protestantes*. Of course, they would condescend to any measures rather than yield one of their number to the embraces of her own family, if that family were faithful to the Holy Mother Church.

"*Caramba* ! the señora will think me a fool, and with all these letters of proof in my pocket too !

Not one word shall I write to her until there be certain tidings of some sort. Bah! what is to hinder the Protestant rogues from escaping a second time, and once over the Rio Grande, Saint Justus himself would not be able to find them."

Señor "Juan Zarco" entered the door of his lodging with a dull pain in his head, a burden upon his spirits, and an unaccustomed weight in the pocket of his gown.



## PART III

### HOMING TREASURES

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God 's in his heaven,  
All 's right with the world

—*Robert Browning*





## I

INDEPENDENCE DAY, the sixteenth of September, passed joyfully over the republic. Shouts of "*Viva la Independencia de Mexico*," were not confined to the corridors of the Instituto Madero. From the Rio Grande on the north to the borders of Central America on the south, there were ready responses to the loyal cry, echoing from every city and village, in honor of the old-time patriot, Hidalgo.

Everywhere in Mexico, save in the hearts of certain opposers of their country's true freedom, there have been rejoicings on this day since the forever-to-be-remembered September sixteenth, eighteen hundred and ten, when the *Grito de Dolores*<sup>1</sup> issued from a patriot priest's lips and rang freedom from ocean to ocean. Perfect freedom, in the fullest sense, is not yet ; but steadily the light advances, the fetters yield, and some day Mexico will be "free indeed."

Of course the Madero Institute celebrated the sixteenth of September as a holiday, and in the afternoon the girls were escorted on the usual ex-

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<sup>1</sup> Hidalgo's cry : "Long live the independence of Mexico," in the town of Dolores.

pedition to the Alameda. There they heard - as little as possible of the open-air speeches, and patronized to the best of their ability the sweetmeat men and the venders of cooling drinks. There was the beautiful music of the Mexican bands and the endless parade of Mexican troops to vary the hours of the afternoon, and at six o'clock a long line of tired girls tramped back to the institute, with little appetite for supper, yet indefatigable of tongue and gesture.

A promenade in the illuminated Plaza de Independencia, followed in the evening. Each teacher had in charge a squad of girls, clad, some in freshly ironed cotton, "and some in velvet gowns."

Round and round the *plaza*, tripped señoras and señoritas; round and round, though in the opposite direction, marched the señors and señoritos. No doubt it seemed to half-exhausted chaperons as if their young charges would never weary, so tireless was the tread of little high-heeled boots, so bright the eyes sparkling beneath hat-brim, or fringe of uncovered hair.

By ten o'clock, however, every institute girl was safely housed within the school walls and lights were out at eleven, though the merrymaking in *plaza* and street did not come to an end with the withdrawal of even so many bright eyes from the festive scene.

Late into the night there was one girl awake,

who could not forget in sleep the rhythm of the band music, nor the flutter of ribbons and of hearts. Ninfa envied Lucita her power of instantly falling asleep after the last interchange of "good-night love-words." The tired girl had not waited for the candles to be extinguished before closing her eyes and sinking into an exhausted sleep.

"Now I am just as tired as you are, Luz Rubio," Ninfa confided into her companion's sleep-deafened ear; "but we are so different in some things. When you are tired, your face grows white and dark circles come under your eyes. You flop down and go to sleep right away. But I get wider and wider awake every moment, while my feet ache and my head feels like a merry-go-round. *Caramba!* those new shoes have very high heels. The señorita said I ought not to wear them to-night because no one in the crowd would really see them, and she knew just how my poor feet would hurt afterward. Oh, how my face burns, and I know I shall never close my eyes again!"

She tossed restlessly, long after the dormitory had grown hushed and dark. There was another cause for Ninfa's uneasiness besides that given by her poor little pinched toes, which will ere long appear. She would have been glad to wake Luz and share her perplexity with her, if she had dared. But she did not dare, and meanwhile the stillness of Lucita's figure close beside her made her really

nervous. At length in desperation she slipped from the bed and stood with her bare feet on the floor. No one else in the room was awake. Through the bars of the doors she could catch a glimpse of the court, dimly lighted by the stars, and the tinkle of the fountain broke the stillness. Far away there were sounds of fireworks and of band music, but the noise of occasional passers-by in the street scarcely penetrated this inside tier of rooms. Ninfa caught up a thick shawl lying across the foot of her bed, and wrapping it around her white gown, stole noiselessly to one of the doors. This she found unbolted as usual, for within the court and corridors of the building, after the outer gates were closed, the occupants were as safe as if protected by castle wall and tower, or so considered themselves.

The stones outside were pleasant to Ninfa's burning feet as she crossed the corridor and court to the fountain. She sat down on the step running around its base and let the night wind cool her feet, while she dipped her hand into the water again and again and bathed her flushed cheeks and beating temples.

Now and then the sky would light up with the flare of rockets, or the burning of calcium lights. The stars would seem to "go out," and yet when the flash was gone there they were, peacefully bright as ever.

Ninfa grew refreshed and then sleepy, and was even nodding as she sat, when the street seemed suddenly filled with a rush of footsteps and a babel of voices. She roused herself and sat listening fearfully to the uproar. It was only the home-going of hundreds of pleasure seekers at the general breaking up of the concourse in the *plaza* and adjoining streets, but Ninfa did not know this.

In the midst of cries of "*Viva la Independencia de Mexico*," "*Viva la Virgen de Guadalupe*," and others, one different from all the rest swelled high above them.

"*Que mueran los protestantes*,"<sup>1</sup> was shouted hoarsely again and again, perhaps by some party of students in the throng roused to a pitch of religious fervor while passing the institute.

With a frightened cry Ninfa stopped her ears and sped across the court to the shelter of the dormitory. Once inside, she heard the uproar with less distinctness and by the time she had drawn the bed-covering closely about her ears the voices came as from a distance, and there was no more such disturbance that night.

Ninfa cuddled close to Lucita, like a little lost chick restored to its mother-wing. In her sleep Lucita wrapped the small, shivering body in her arms and Ninfa sighed contentedly. Her last thought before falling asleep was this :

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<sup>1</sup> "Death to the Protestants,"

"I should be afraid—oh, I know I should—to be a Protestant! How those men howled, like hounds at the hunt! Perhaps, though, with Luz close by, I might be brave, because I do believe she is right and the señoritas too, about the good God and Mary's Son."

After "the sixteenth" school work was wont to be undertaken with renewed diligence in preparation for the public examinations to take place before the closing of the school in mid-November. Circumstances had already combined, however, to interfere seriously with the thorough work promised themselves by two of the girls.

Hitherto Lucita Rubio had followed a very even course in school. Her home life had been uneventful and her school life successful. It had not been difficult for her, at any time, to lead her classes, as she had a natural inclination toward the attainment of perfection in anything undertaken by her. Her disposition was sunny and patient, and the care and cleanliness to which she had grown accustomed during her life at the mission school had fostered the native nicety of her manners and person. The schoolgirls declared that Lucita looked like a princess in her everyday clothes, for her manner of stepping through corridor or street and the carriage of her well-shaped head were full of grace, while no faded *rebozo* nor cotton gown

could deaden the clearness of her complexion or dim the soft lustre of her gray eyes. Her voice was low and musical in speech—a full alto in song. Her heart was filled to overflowing with love for those who gave her love, and though she was already more womanly than Ninfa in her sympathies, there was much of the same artlessness and simplicity in each of the girls. Where Ninfa was petulant with fortune's slights, Lucita was only patient, yet both were ready to enjoy to the utmost the good things of this world.

The Señorita Julia met Lucita in the corridor one Saturday morning in the following October, as she was about to enter the sewing class with her embroidery frame in her hands. The señorita was a little pale, but her hand was cool and firm as she laid it on Lucita's to arrest her progress.

"I have asked the Señorita Concha to excuse you this morning," she said. "Come to my room, Luz; I have something to tell you."

Lucita obeyed immediately, following the lady's hasty steps with wonder in her face. A slight droop of the corners of her mouth was the only manifestation of her disappointment at the interruption of her work.

This weekly sewing class was attended by all the girls, with mending of all kinds to be done, while fancy work of embroidery, crocheting, or drawn-work was taught by a Mexican lady.

As Lucita was accustomed to spend each second Saturday at home, she had but half the opportunity enjoyed by the other girls for completing work on hand. Just now she and Ninfa were engaged on similar bits of work, the embroidering of wreaths of forget-me-nots in blue silk in the corners of handkerchiefs, Ninfa's to be presented to her grandmother, and Lucita's an order from one of the teachers. Lucita's commencement dress of white cambric was to be bought with the proceeds of this piece of embroidery, and she was anxious to complete her task and begin the stitching of the long seams for the skirt of her new dress.

"Your *mamá* came to see me last night after study hour, Lucita," were the señorita's first words, when both had seated themselves in the teacher's room. "I found her at my door when I returned to my room. The corridor was dark and you did not see her sitting on my doorstep. She came while we were in the schoolroom and waited to speak with me. You remember that you went directly to your bed after studying, and when I looked into the dormitory after your—after Doña Teresa had left, you were already asleep."

"Then *mamá* did not wish to see me?" Lucita said, with a hurt quiver in her voice. "I should think she might have at least saluted me. But perhaps something is wrong. Tell me quick, señorita, is my *papá* ill, or my little brother?"



"Don Luis is not quite so well as usual, Lucita," was the reply. "He has not been able to be out of bed for some days. If he does not get better soon, I think we shall have to let you go home to see him during next week. But it was he who sent Doña Teresa here to tell me something which is very surprising to me, and which will be even more so to you."

"Does my *papá* wish me to know it?" Lucita asked. "Why did not *mamá* come to me, then, if I was to be told also?"

"They wished me to tell you, my dear. It was very hard for your *mamá* to tell me. She could not have told you, she said. Don Luis will not be happy now until you know a secret which has been kept from you for long, long years."

Lucita left her seat and came nearer to the señorita, kneeling at her feet and looking steadily into the anxious face studying her own.

"Now tell me everything, señorita, without any more explanations," she pleaded. "*Papá* has some dreadful disease that is going to kill him; is not that it? And you are trying to prepare me for it. I am ready to hear about it and I wish you would make haste and tell me."

"It is only rheumatism from which he is suffering, my child," the señorita hastened to reply; "but the doctor says there is some danger of its reaching his heart. Luz, he has suffered a long time," she

continued, her voice breaking a little, as the girl leaned her elbows upon her knee for support in her kneeling and clasped her hands together, while her eyes were still fixed upon the speaker's face. "Doña Teresa tells me that he has had rheumatism, now and then, since he was a young man. The dampness of their house in the south of Mexico made him very ill once soon after their marriage, and he never fully recovered, as you know. Did you not know that your parents were from the south, Lucita?"

"*Sí*, señorita, for I was born there. Is *papá*, then, going to die very soon?" she asked steadily.

"No, not yet, Luz. And it was not of that that he wished me to speak to you."

"Then Pepito is sick. Ah, I have been fearing for Pepito. He is very little and weak, and so many of my little brothers have died."

"No, no; he is well, and he smiled happily at me as I tickled his cheek last night. I think he is growing nicely now, and some day—who knows?—he may be your mother's comfort and support. Now remember, Lucita," the teacher went on in an altered voice, "that what I am about to say is said at the special request of Don Luis, and you must think of this fact afterward as a proof of how much he loves you, as if you were his own daughter—— Wait and hear me before you speak, my child."

Then the Señorita Julia related to Lucita all that

Doña Teresa knew and had told her of the connection of her fosterdaughter, Luz, with the Barrera family. Lucita learned, that Teresa's pretty little friend, Manuela Valdivia, had been captivated by the charms and courtship of Don Vicente, the handsome blonde youth of El Dorado, and that she had ridden away with him as his bride from the humble village of Las Rosas, blessed by the priest of the parish church, all ignorant of the cold welcome to be hers in the home of her husband ; that she had returned, less than three years later, to find a fever-stricken village and a father dying of the fever, while her old mother lay already dead of another disease, similar to that now destroying Don Luis ; that Manuela had brought but one of her twin babies with her, the little, delicate, fair-haired Luz ; that the young mother had died a week later, in an agony of distress concerning both her babies ; and that Doña Teresa's own little Luz having perished during the first days of the fever, the bereaved mother had taken into her empty arms the motherless infant as it lay gasping in the fever.

There had been no time to secure directions from Manuela as to the baby's return to its father's people, for the dying woman's thoughts, at the last, had run only upon the sickness seizing her child. Therefore, having received the priest's sanction to her adoption of the sick baby, Teresa with her

husband and several neighbors had fled from the village. The priest had been convinced of the certain death to follow his last glimpse of the little one, and he had only hastened the party in its flight to higher ground among the hills. After a year of intermittent journeying northward, Don Luis and his little family had finally reached Saltillo, where they decided to remain and work for the little girl who had taken the place of their own Luz.

"For you did not die, Lucita," the señorita concluded, pausing to see the effect of her story upon the listening girl.

No answer followed, and on examining the face which had drooped upon her knee, the señorita discovered that Lucita had fainted.

## II

THE swoon lasted but a few seconds, for instead of losing time by calling for assistance, the señorita quickly laid Luz at full length on the floor and bathed her face with cold water. Presently the gray eyes opened and looked into the anxious face above them.

"Now you are better," the teacher said softly; "but you must not get up just yet. I will slip this little cushion under your head and you may lie still on the cool matting."

"Did I go to sleep?" Luz asked weakly. "It seems to me that you were telling me something that made my head feel a little sick. Ah, I am remembering now." She lay with her eyes closed, her features working piteously, and the tears rolling down her cheeks from beneath the long, dark eyelashes. .

"Are you not glad to find such a sister as Ninfa?" the señorita asked.

"Is she my sister, really and truly? How does *mamá* know that the other woman, Manuela, you called her, had a child named Ninfa? And if she had, how do you and she know that it is this Ninfa?" Luz asked, her voice still trembling.

"Do you not remember that Ninfa herself loves to tell the story of her little twin-sister, who she thinks died of the same fever which killed her mother—your mother also, Luz? Besides, Doña Teresa and Don Luis knew Ninfa's father, Vicente Barreda, very well, and they know it was his child they had taken. They did it to save your life, you know, my dear, and they have been as devoted as your own parents could have been."

"Do you think I need to have you tell me that, señorita?" Lucita exclaimed, sitting up suddenly, with blood enough in her cheeks now, and her eyes shining. "For my part, I shall never think of them as any other than my own dear parents. *Mamá* can never be only Doña Teresa to me, and as for *papá*—but is it all quite certain, señorita, certain enough for me to tell Ninfa?"

"Quite certain enough, Lucita. But I think you must wait before telling Ninfa, perhaps, until we hear from the Señora Barreda, your grandmother, to whom I wrote last night, at Doña Teresa's request. She will probably have instructions for us in the matter. Do you think you can keep the secret a little while, Lucita, even from your own sister?"

Lucita smiled and nodded, then her face clouded over again. "Did *mamá* not seem a little sorry about it all, señorita?" she asked in a troubled voice. "I cannot understand what any of it means,

except that I am not *mamá's* daughter any longer, and am Ninfa's sister instead, but *papá* and *mamá* must have had some reason for telling their secret now. Did she look a little sad, señorita, or cry?"

"You can never know, Luz, what this acknowledgment has cost them," the señorita replied gravely. "Your *mamá* was heartbroken as she confided all to me, and said that if it had been left to her she did not think she would ever have given you back to your real relatives, to whom, of course, you belong."

Luz started at the last words but passed them by as she replied: "I shall be their daughter as long as I live, and Pepito shall be my brother. Nothing can ever change it, not even—no, not even Ninfa's being my sister."

One more question was asked and answered, for Luz could not understand why her parents should be making their confession at this late day, when nothing had happened to any one to require it, and when she herself was happier as Ninfa's friend than she could possibly be as her sister, considering all the separations and complications suggested by this strange revelation.

"Your father has not for a long time been happy about the secret they were carrying," the señorita said solemnly, in answer to the question, "and now that he is ill, he wishes any settlement that ought to be made, made at once. I think you

can appreciate his wishing to do what is right, Lucita, even if that should threaten the perfect happiness of his home. You have been a good daughter to them, my dear child."

Luz rose to her feet, pale yet strong again. "Thank you for telling me all about it, señorita," she said. "May I go to my room now and think awhile about what it all means? I do not believe that I can sew this morning, with my head so confused."

She had not long remained in the quiet of the deserted dormitory, when she felt a soft touch upon her cheek as she lay on her bed with closed eyes. She opened her eyes to see Ninfa's concerned face close to hers.

"I thought you might be having one of your headaches again," the girl said, "and the Señorita Concha said I might come and see if you wanted anything. It does ache? Yes, I thought so. Let me lay this wet handkerchief on your forehead, and then I will let you go to sleep. I am going to take your frame with me and go on with your embroidery, because I am not in a bit of a hurry about mine."

Ninfa tripped out into the sunlight again, bearing her sister's embroidery frame with her and wondering why her heart seemed to swell with a certain new happiness, strange in her experience. Was it because she had denied Ninfa, for once,



and was learning to think of another before herself? A novel sensation, truly, for the spoiled girl, yet only one among the many already experienced by her in the little community of *protestantes*.

Thus it is explained how interruption threatened the hearty studying of one schoolgirl. As for Ninfa, for three weeks and more, she had had something to think about besides books, and of a much more absorbing nature to a romantic girl than the multiplication table or the conjugation of English verbs. Even before the holiday of "the sixteenth," it had begun.

Ninfa had been sitting at the piano one morning at her usual practice hour, and hearing a slight sound at the window behind her had turned in time to see a wisp of white paper flutter through the half-open shutter and fall at her feet.

Her first impulse had been to fly to the window and close the shutter, before even touching the note on the floor. After the window had been secured and she had hesitated for a moment or two over the scrap of paper, she was seized with a vain regret that she had not peeped through the bars in time to catch a glimpse of the author, or at least of the bearer of the note. It was too late now, for no one bringing a surreptitious note to one of the boarders would dare linger outside after accomplishing his mission. Ninfa consoled herself, there-

fore, with a speedy perusal of the note. There was no signature to the few lines, not even the initials "A. C." They read as follows :

Be careful. *The wolves are hungry.* Do not read the Bible until you reach home, as an innocent lamb needs a shepherd's guidance in new pastures. You shall hear again from the writer of this. Be prudent and *do nothing hastily.*

Ninfa was disappointed in this *billet doux*. Why should she need a warning to "do nothing hastily"? Bah! the words, with their underscorings, smacked of Padre Justo Prieto. She had been forgetting his existence until reminded by Carmen's words at the fountain, and here it was again, "innocent lamb," "wolves." This anonymous warning about the reading of the Bible had come too late, for she had immediately fixed upon a dark green volume with large print, as soon as the señorita had offered several for her choice, and had already read several whole chapters in it, besides committing to memory many verses. She would always close the shutters of the music room firmly after this, and the writer of the note might find other means of making his uninteresting communications. Perhaps, after all, the message had been meant for some one else.

For a week Ninfa held to her resolve to keep the shutters closed behind her during her morning

practice hour, but she kept the note hidden away and did not even mention the matter to Lucita.

Greatly to her surprise her hour for practice was suddenly changed just before Independence Day, and she was directed to use henceforth the other piano, occupying an inside room opening only upon the court.

In the crowd at the Alameda, on the afternoon of the holiday, she had been rudely jostled by a poorly clad woman, who had at the same time thrust a bit of paper into her hand. Ninfa's surprised fingers had closed nervously upon this paper, and there it had remained in a close grip until the girls had returned to the institute for supper.

Ninfa had managed to separate herself from the other girls after supper, long enough to spell out the penciled lines, now scarcely legible on the soiled sheet.

"I have been noticed at the window," the words ran, "and must have other means of communicating with you. Can you not manage to speak with me at night perhaps, at a window or door? The bearer of this will be at the front door tomorrow, at eight o'clock, with chocolate to sell. Buy of her, and give the money wrapped in the paper containing your answer. A matter concerning the happiness of your whole future life is at stake, and much time has already been wasted since you have stayed behind closed shutters. If

you are not prompt now, a great wrong may be done to one who will one day be as dear to you as your own self."

Ninfa gasped with dismay on reading these words. Then, tearing the paper into shreds, she cast the pieces from her.

"I will not do such a thing," she thought to herself trembling. "I wish I dared tell Lucita; but she thought it very wrong of me to have taken 'A. C.'s' note, and I do not believe she would love me any more if I should let her know that this is the second note already from another person, whose name I do not know."

So she kept the secret to herself, strong enough to resist the temptation of buying chocolate on the next day, when the girls were allowed to crowd around the woman who came promptly at eight o'clock, yet she was too timid to speak to Lucita or to any of the teachers about the matter.

Many times during the days following, while seemingly intent upon her books, she was wondering whether the "great wrong" had already befallen the mysterious person who was one day to be as dear to her as her own self. All were well at home, her grandmother, Maria, Guadalupe, Pedro, the parrot, the canary. Certainly the warning could not have come from them, nor could it have come from the bonny cavalier of the red, red horse, and whose initials were "A. C." Even if

the words had referred to him as "the one who," etc., surely he was a valiant enough knight not to need the good offices of a schoolgirl.

So the weeks passed and October arrived.

Each girl's secret weighed upon her mind and distracted her thoughts from the coming examinations, and still no letter was received from the Señora Barrera in the far south.

The next two days following the Saturday on which Lucita had learned the secret of her birth passed as usual in the school.

Ninfa had heard no more from her mysterious correspondent, and had concluded that she was judged no longer worthy of attention. Luz, in her new thoughts, tried in vain to fix her mind upon her studies during the following week, and she felt that she could not long bear the strain imposed upon her by the señorita's counsel. There seemed something almost dishonest in withholding from Ninfa the truth so lately revealed to herself, and in the midst of this feeling there was a sharp regret, and almost a morbid self-reproaching, in her thoughts of her foster-parents. She grew feverishly anxious for the next Friday to arrive, when she should go home for her fortnightly visit. The face of the world was changed for Luz, yet, though its present aspect seemed to promise strange happiness and ease, she was all the while true enough to herself to feel honest sorrow at the

change. Her thoughts flew, more often than ever, to the poor house on the hill, where Don Luis sat crippled and helpless and counting the days until the time for her next visit, where Doña Teresa industriously rolled the corn between two stones, glad to be able to support the family until the daughter should be free to teach the *niñas*, and where Pepito lay in his scanty clothing sucking his brown thumb, and content with the world as he found it. Could she ever give them up? Her one consolation in all the tumult of her mind, was the realization that whatever must come it had been the will of her *papá*, Don Luis, that the truth should be known, and that she had nothing to do but to be guided by those who were wiser than she.

But Don Luis in his pain, and Luz in hers, were not required to wait until Friday for relief.

With Wednesday afternoon came a summons for Luz to hasten to the dying man's bedside.

Doña Teresa herself came with the message, leaving a friend to watch with her husband during her absence. She whispered into the Señorita Julia's ear, on hurrying away from the school, that her husband had "many desires to see the girl Ninfa Barreda, if only for a moment," and that he would esteem it a great favor if she might be allowed to accompany Lucita, as soon as both girls could be made ready for the street. The good

woman was sent away with the promise that her husband's request should be granted, and she had resumed her place at the bedside of Don Luis but a very few moments before the teacher and the two girls arrived.

Now at last Lucita found that she had no room in her thoughts for anything but grief over her father's suffering and approaching death. She fell upon her knees at his side, while the visitors stood by in pitiful silence after receiving his first greeting.

Don Luis looked from Ninfa's troubled face to Lucita's and shook his head slowly.

"There is naught alike in your faces," he whispered to Luz. "Does she know?" he added, with another look into Ninfa's face.

"Nothing, *papá*," was the reply. "The señorita said that we must wait to hear from——"

"Yes, I know," Don Luis interposed. Then he spoke to Ninfa. "Come nearer, Señorita Ninfa. My eyes are perhaps a little dimmed and I wish to see your face. Ah, I was right. There is no likeness to our daughter—to Luz. Wife, it is as if Manuela stood before us. Have you not noticed it?" Teresa nodded dumbly. "Wonderful!" the sick man exclaimed weakly. "It might be she, herself, come here to claim her child. I am glad it will be so well with Luz. Will you be good to this girl, Señorita Ninfa, when I am dead?"

Ninfa's eyes filled with tears as she answered

him : "Do not doubt it, Don Luis, for I love her with all my heart."

Don Luis smiled and then sighed, but so wearily that the Señorita Julia made a sign of farewell to Teresa and quickly led Ninfa out of the house.

"Why did Lucita's father wish to see me?" was Ninfa's question as they entered the street. "And he spoke my mother's name ; did he know my mother once, señorita?"

Then for the first time the astonished girl learned that Lucita's parents had known her own, when all four were young and brave and happy in the south ; and Ninfa walked homeward at the teacher's side, her mind filled with the purpose to ask Teresa the questions so long unanswered by her grandmother.

The Señorita Julia seemed able to tell her little beyond the fact that Ninfa's mother and Teresa had been friends in their girlhood, having grown to womanhood in the same ranch village of Las Rosas, in the southwest. What joy to think that ere long she would have some certain knowledge of the young mother, to whom, as she had for the first time learned that day, she herself bore so strange a resemblance that a dying man had said : "It is as if Manuela stood before us."

Why had her grandmother never told her this when, over and over again Ninfa had heard of the wonderful likeness there had been between her twin sister and their *papá*?



### III

DON LUIS lay on the rough trestle bed, with only a thin mattress of shavings between his suffering body and the hard boards. He had never been accustomed to softness in any shape, poor man, except that shining from Love's eyes, and on this last night of his life there were other things for him to think about than his aching bones. His thick shock of black hair had been shorn close to the skin, which made him look very unlike himself to Lucita, as she sat at his side. There was more than the shaven head, however, to give a strangeness to the familiar face. There was a new light in his eyes and an expression of peace about his mouth not often seen there during the past months of his suffering. It was thus with him between the attacks of awful pain and gaspings for breath. When the paroxysms came on his eyes would stare as if with affright, his hollow cheeks would seem to sink still closer inward, while the breath came and went between his bluish lips in labored pants.

"Try to sleep, *papá*," Lucita said, during one of the quiet intervals when the troubled heart was relieved of its pain. "You have not slept all day, *mamá* says, and the baby is quiet now, so there

will be nothing to disturb you. *Mamá* is resting also," she added, with a look over her shoulder into the dark corner where two figures lay curled up on a mat on the floor.

"What time is it, Lucita?" Don Luis asked in his faint voice.

"The bells have just struck nine, *papá*."

"Then lay your head on the pillow beside mine, *hijita*,<sup>1</sup> and go to sleep yourself. As for me, I do not wish to sleep to-night."

"*Papá!*" Lucita exclaimed in great distress.

"Since we have talked it all over together, Lucita, and now that you are sure that you love us well, even though not a drop of our blood runs in your veins, I am filled with peace and quietness. Between the attacks of pain I am at ease, and would rather lie here thinking of my to-morrow than wear myself out trying to sleep. But it is not thus with you, Luz. You look pale and weary. Close your eyes, girl, and I will watch for us both."

Lucita laid her head upon the pillow, as Don Luis had bidden her, and before many seconds had passed fell into a troubled sleep. The minutes grew into an hour. A longer interval than usual elapsed between the spasms of suffering, and all was still in the little room.

A small lamp burned on a table, and the win-

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<sup>1</sup> Little daughter.

dow, high up above the floor, had been left open to give the dying man much-needed air. The door into the hallway was also open, and a stream of cool air entered from the back door upon the hillside. No chill breath of night would ever again harm Don Luis, and the freshness was eagerly inhaled by his oppressed lungs.

The streets were silent now, and the chattering voices of neighbors sitting in their respective *corrals* under the starlight, were growing less noisy, when a sudden and loud scream of agony startled the sleepers in the sick-room, and caused many who heard it outside to cross themselves fervently and invoke the Virgin in prayer.

"Holy Mother of God! who can it be?" a woman exclaimed, flinging open her back door and gazing out into the darkness.

"It must be Luis Rubio," her husband whispered at her side. "It is the death cry, Antonia. May heaven rest his soul!"

By this time several persons had opened their doors and were standing on the rough ground behind the row of houses, all with startled faces turned toward the open door leading into Rubio's house. No other sound had followed the scream and, as if fascinated beyond their powers of resistance by the deathlike quiet succeeding it, the men and women crept softly toward the hallway and inside, with staring eyes and bated breath. The fact that a

*protestante* had been dying near by all day, far from robbing death of its terrors rather added to them, and the neighbors had kept themselves aloof during the preceding hours.

It seemed too bad, they whispered now among themselves, that two lone women must battle with the destroyer, and they might at least look on and be ready if help should be asked. Perhaps at the last Don Luis would repent and agree to have a priest come to receive his confession and administer the sacrament.

Fearfully clutching at each other's garments these spectators stood in the dusk of the hall and whispered into each other's ears how awful a thing it was to die outside of the Holy Church.

"Straight to hell he will be going, if he does not repent and confess," one woman said to another.

"And the baby to limbo, if it should die, poor, puny thing. For they will not have it baptized into the most Holy Church, and who will have pity on a poor Protestant baby in limbo?"

Meanwhile all was quiet again inside the sick-room. The last struggle had been sharp, wrenching from the man's lips that one cry of pain, but it had been mercifully short this time. Now he could smile faintly in response to his wife's agonized questions, and his cold hand feebly pressed Lucita's warm one. He spoke with difficulty, but his eyes were as clear as ever, and seeing the eager faces

pressing forward in the doorway he made Luz understand that he wished the neighbors to enter.

Lucita left his side to repeat the invitation, and though one or two crept away at her words and returned to their homes, three or four women and one or two men silently followed her when she returned to the bedside.

Don Luis smiled upon them all, and in his husky voice told them that they need not be sorry for him, as he was ready to leave the world and go to a better.

"May the Holy Virgin see you safely there!" a woman cried fervently, dropping upon her knees.

"No, the Lord, my Master, is with me and will give me a welcome," Don Luis replied, pronouncing his words with short pauses for breath between each one. "I hope I shall see Mary too," he continued; "but I shall find her like myself, only a redeemed sinner, saved by the blood of Jesus."

The women shook their heads in pity at such blindness, but the sick man's smile was so peaceful and his manner so convinced that no verbal reply was offered to his words.

After sipping with great difficulty a draught of medicine offered him by Lucita, he spoke again with more strength in his voice.

"Do not think that I am dying in error, *amigos mios*," he said. "If you will listen to God alone, he will tell you that the *protestantes* came here to teach

us the truth. God is a kind father and loves us better than I love Teresa or Lucita or the boy, and he wishes us to take our prayers and our confessions straight to him, not to a priest or the saints."

One of the women had stepped to the foot of the bed and, extracting a colored picture of a saint from the bosom of her sack, proceeded to uncover the dying man's feet and to slip the little battered saint beneath them. At the same time another woman held up before his eyes a small wooden crucifix she had brought with her.

Don Luis smiled as he felt the movement near his feet. "What you are putting there, Doña Rosa, can help no more than it can hurt me. Ah, yes," he continued, turning to the woman with the crucifix, "the cross of the Saviour! But it was a larger, more cruel cross than that, *amiga mia*, upon which he suffered. I wear graven on my heart the only image of that cross needed to direct my thoughts to him. You need not trouble to hold it, Doña Antonia, for my eyes are fast losing sight of things made by man's hands."

"A priest! Don Luis, let us send for a priest. David, my husband, will go for Padre Ocampo, and be back before you can groan seven times."

"*Papá*, I will send them away," Lucita whispered; "why do you let them distress you? We want to have you all to ourselves."

"I have spoken with them too little in my life," he replied solemnly. "In the hour of death I still have a duty to perform. Give me another sip of the medicine, Lucita."

Teresa herself offered the draught, not suffering Lucita to rise from her seat at her father's side, lest one of the visitors should usurp her place.

"My friends," Don Luis began, and his voice was perceptibly weaker, "though I will not confess my sins to a priest to-night, I have a confession to make to you."

He paused while they all dropped upon their knees, and listened with bated breath for what was to come.

"I have been a *protestante* for six years," he continued, "and most of the time I have lived in this neighborhood. Perhaps if I had been brave and clever, each one of you who kneels here now, and many more besides, might have been like us, believing in Jesus Christ as our Saviour and only mediator. I am only a poor, humble man, and I have not always spoken for the gospel when I might have done so. Perhaps I have been even ashamed of my religion sometimes, God forgive me! I do not expect to wear a golden crown in heaven, for I deserve no reward, no reward but just getting there, and that will be for Jesus' sake, not for mine.

"Friends, think about what I am telling you. I

am no preacher or learned man to say beautiful words, but I can tell you that Jesus died for sinners and that the angels are glad when poor men and women find their way straight to him, without virgins or saints or priests coming in between."

Another short spasm contracted his face for a few seconds and then he spoke once more.

"Go hear the evangelicals preach and tell about God's love. It is God's love that helps a man to die."

The men in the little group about the bed had listened as intently as had the women. One of them spoke in a deep, hoarse voice, strongly in contrast to the feeble tones of Don Luis.

"Are you then not afraid to die, Don Luis?" he asked.

But the sick man was past answering in words. He smiled, shook his head, and whispered to Luz to sing.

Lucita nerved herself to the effort and after the first words succeeded in steadying her voice enough to sing the whole of the hymn beginning,

*Cerca de ti, Señor,<sup>1</sup>  
Quiero llegar.*

Don Luis nodded his head slightly from time to time, as if to say: "*Amigo*, that is my answer. What more would you ask?"

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<sup>1</sup> "Nearer, my God, to thee."



There was quiet again after Lucita's voice died away with the last words. Some of the women murmured prayers where they sat crouched on the floor, while Don Luis appeared to sleep. The cathedral bells struck the hour of midnight before the dying man again opened his eyes.

"Lucita!" he called loudly.

"Yes, *papá*, here I am, close beside you," was the soft reply

"You have been a good daughter to us. Do not forget your—I mean my wife and the baby when you go away from them. You have promised me to do what is right and to go to your grandmother whenever the right time comes?"

"Yes, *papá*; but only because you have said that I should. I do not wish to leave *mamá* and my *hermanito*."

"I know," he replied; "but Teresa also wishes to do the right thing, when she knows what it is. God will take care of Teresa and the little one. Now go to sleep, my child, for you look very tired. The Lord watches with me!"

Don Luis never spoke again, and when, half an hour later, the witnesses of the death scene stole quietly away, leaving one kind neighbor to assist Teresa in her last duties to the dead, more than one thought to himself:

"It is a beautiful way to die."

Don David muttered to himself as he stumbled

in the dark toward his own door, "It seemed as if he were starting on a fine journey to the United States of the North, and as if he were expecting great happiness ahead. It must be a good thing not to fear death."

A week later found Lucita again at school. She quietly settled back into the old routine of study, and by degrees her face lost the anxious expression it had worn for many days.

## IV

OCTOBER was drawing to an end before the long-expected letter arrived from the Señora Barreda. The Señorita Julia read it over carefully to herself, and more than once, before communicating its contents to Luz.

From the letter she learned that the señora had been away from home when the señorita's "most esteemed favor" had reached Guadalupe, and that it had not followed her, as she had been off the regular path of the mails. Ninfa's letters to her had already kindled in her mind a strange interest in the child's schoolmate, Luz Rubio, and her granddaughter's playful manner of alluding to this girl as "my sister Luz" had deepened this interest. The girl's age, her countenance and disposition, as described by Ninfa, and the fact that Ninfa had recently written of her new friend's southern birth, had aroused torturing suggestions in the señora's mind. Before leaving the city, therefore, she had dispatched a devoted friend to Saltillo to make suitable inquiries in her own name concerning the birthplace and parentage of this Luz Rubio. Yet so slight had been her hope of discovering any traces of her son's lost child, that

she had strongly insisted upon a judicious reticence on the part of her messenger concerning the mission in any interview he might have with Ninfa or the Americans. It would have been cruel to put false hopes into the poor child's mind.

Wearying at last of the messenger's utter silence, having heard not a word since his departure in September, the señora had set out on a visit to her *hacienda*, and thence had continued her journey to Las Rosas itself, whence her son's child had been removed by the peasant folks. There she had learned that the woman, Teresa Flores, was indeed the wife of one Luis Rubio, her maiden name having clung to her even after her marriage. Don Luis had been a stranger in the village until a short while before his marriage with Teresa, and even now there were no others dwelling there by the name of Rubio. Teresa's relatives were many, however, though none had had tidings of her since her flight from the city. The old priest was dead, but there was more than one Flores left who remembered that Teresa had carried away Manuela's dying infant rolled in an end of her *rebozo*.

The señora had retraced the weary miles over mountain and plain and cañon with a consuming desire to enter the first train for the north and hasten to embrace both her children. All lingering doubt as to the identity of Ninfa's schoolmate, Luz, with her own grandchild was dissipated by

the reading of the señorita's letter, found on her return home, and containing Teresa's confession that Luz Rubio was in truth a Barreda, daughter of Vicente and Manuela.

The children must be told of their relationship, by all means, and she herself would have great difficulty in resisting her impulse to fly at once to them. She was getting older now, however, as the effects of these long journeyings were proving to herself, and she must wait until the "day of premiums,"<sup>1</sup> before giving herself this great happiness. The letter closed with profuse thanks to the *americana* who had so kindly written, and who had been so good a friend to her "little ones," and with a devout recommendation of them all to the kind mercies of God and "the most Holy Virgin."

A postscript explained that other letters had been found awaiting the señora, which told of her messenger's extreme illness in Saltillo. This illness accounted for the silence and apparent unconcern of the friend to whom she had entrusted her interests. Ninfa would be sorry to learn that her old playmate, Justo Prieto, was probably at death's door at that moment, at his lodging in Saltillo.

Luz was sitting at the foot of one of the pillars outside of her dormitory, at work with slate and pencil, when she heard her name called by the

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<sup>1</sup>Closing exercises of the school.

Señorita Julia on the day of the letter's arrival. The young lady stood at the outer door, holding an open letter in her hand. Luz laid her hand upon her heart as if to steady its sudden startling throbs, and then hurriedly responded to her teacher's beckoning finger.

"You may bring Ninfa, if you like," the señorita said, smiling. "I think she will be interested in this letter as well as yourself."

"Is it from Guadalajara?" Luz asked, trembling. "Then may I tell Ninfa everything? I should like to tell her first."

Receiving permission to do so, Luz skimmed away like a swallow. Down the corridor she flew, past groups of girls playing at "checks" on the pavement, with not a word for anybody on the way.

She stopped in the doorway of the small music-room, where Ninfa was practising, and stood there for a few seconds behind the pretty figure on the piano stool. Ninfa went steadily on with her work, unconscious of her auditor, until Luz began to hum an alto accompaniment to the simple theme the former was studying.

The brown hands fell with a crash upon the piano keys, and Ninfa wheeled around upon the stool with quick words of rebuke upon her lips. Luz went toward her with flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

"What is it, Luz?" Ninfa asked, surprised at this interruption from Lucita, of all others. "You startled me with your deep voice behind me and I do not like to be startled. My heart beats as if it would burst through my ribs."

"So does mine," Luz replied, standing by in some embarrassment now, and fingering the music on the rack.

"Let me hear it," Ninfa exclaimed laughingly, laying her head on Lucita's breast and throwing her arms around her waist. "Yes, it really does thump," she said, lifting her face to Luz. "What is the matter, and why have you come to steal away my practice hour? The señorita will give us ten demerits apiece, and besides, I do not half know my piece. Go away now, Luz, and let me study. I have been thinking of my grandmother all this time, and of how proud she will be to hear me play."

"Ninfa," Luz faltered, "I too have been thinking about your grandmother. Suppose she were my grandmother too; do you think she would like me?"

"She would like all but your being a Protestant," was the frank reply.

"Do you think that would keep her from loving me, Ninfa, if I were her real granddaughter?"

Ninfa's face grew wistful. "I have wondered about that very thing sometimes, Luz," she said.

"Not about you, but about myself. Would *mamá* love me just as well if I were a Protestant, or would she be proud and cold and not call me her little Ninfa any more? But what makes you speak so, Luz? I do not wish to be sad now and thinking of such things makes me sad."

"Listen to me, Ninfa," the other said solemnly. "We have to think of such things, because—oh! how can I tell you? *Chulita*,<sup>1</sup> you are my own little sister, and your grandmother is really mine. Our father was Vicente Barreda, Ninfa, and *mamá*—Doña Teresa—took me from our dead mother's arms and brought me away to Saltillo."

Ninfa's eyes grew wild and frightened, and she clung to Luz without a word.

"Are you sorry to be my sister?" Luz asked, with trouble in her eyes.

But Ninfa burst into a fit of weeping so sudden and so violent that Luz could do nothing with her, and finally had to lead her, sobbing, to the Señorita Julia's room.

The girls stared in amazement at the sight of the merry Ninfa in such distress, and many hurried forward to offer consolation and assistance.

"What is it?" they asked. "Is it a *dolor*?<sup>2</sup> The señoritas will give her medicine if you take her to them, Luz. *Pobrecita*, how she cries! Is any one dead, perhaps?"

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<sup>1</sup> Darling.

<sup>2</sup> Pain.



For once Luz grew impatient with her school-mates, and brushing past the condoling crowd continued her way in silence toward the señorita's door.

Her heart was as heavy as lead, and all the exhilaration of the past moments had vanished. If Ninfa was going to receive the news like this, it would have been better to keep it a secret forever in her own beating heart.

The teacher was ready for them, and quickly closed the door upon any intruding gaze from the outside. Once inside, Ninfa threw back her *rebozo*, with which she had shrouded her head on passing through the corridor, and again threw her arms around Luz, mingling hysterical laughter now with her sobs.

"There, there, Ninfa, be quiet," the teacher said, with a sympathetic break in her own voice. "If you cry and laugh at the same time, I am sure Luz and I will not know whether you are most sorry or glad to hear our news. Sit down, both of you, and let me read aloud your grandmother's letter."

Without a word the girls listened to the letter from beginning to end. When the signature, "Alejandra de la Palma de Barreda," was reached, Ninfa sighed deeply.

"Señorita, I cannot understand it, at all," she said in distress. "You teach that the Virgin Mary has no power to make us either happy or unhappy,

yet it was she who sent me here to find my sister. *Mamá* asked her to decide whether I should come to this school or go to that of the *monjas* across the street. A priest held the cards for her, and the ace of spades, for this school, turned up in his right hand, while the ace of diamonds would have meant the other school. It seems as though the Virgin would have wished me to go to the Catholic school; yet here, you see, I have found our Luz. Do you suppose she had nothing to do with it, señorita?"

"What do you think about it, Luz?" the teacher asked, wishing to know the thought shining in the girl's gray eyes, as Ninfa spoke.

"I do not think that Mary had anything to do with it, señorita," Luz answered. "And I am sure that if she is what the Roman Catholics think, she would never have let Ninfa come here, even to find a sister."

"But the ace of spades turned up, Luz, and *mamá* had asked her to decide," Ninfa objected.

"Who held the cards, Ninfa?" the señorita asked.

"Don Justo Prieto, a priest. He is *mamá's* friend too, and a very learned young man, just from college. I cannot believe that he is dying, and in Saltillo too," Ninfa added softly.

The señorita was silent for a moment.

"I like to think that God's hand is in everything," she said presently. "Of course no discus-

sion of ours is needed to prove whether or not Mary had a part in the decision, for the truth is beyond any mere discussion, my dear child. You must remember your verse, Ninfa, learned long ago. There is truly but 'one God,' you know, and it is he who rules the world. It was not by chance that the ace of spades turned up in the priest's hands. Whatever human hands had to do with the decision, God's was the guiding hand after all. There is but 'one mediator,' also, as your verse teaches us, and that one is not Mary, you know."

"Then does God hear the prayers people pray to Mary and the saints, señorita, and does he really answer them?" Luz asked quickly.

"Certainly he hears them. We are told that 'the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good'; do you suppose that his ears are deafened to any cry that his creatures make? But he is not pleased when any other is put into his place as God and Father, and if prayer to any saint seems to be answered by God, it is because this answer is to fall in with his own plans. He uses strange instruments for working out his plans for his people.

"Is all this beyond your comprehension, Ninfa?" she added, smiling at the girl, who had apparently ceased to listen and sat gazing in a kind of rapture into her sister's interested face. "All I mean to

say is, that I think the Lord, not Mary, sent you here to find your sister. Are you very glad, and do you not feel like thanking him in your heart?"

"Oh, Luz, how happy we shall be!" Ninfa cried ecstatically. "I am thanking God in my heart, right now, señorita, and it means more than just *gracias á Dios*.<sup>1</sup> Everybody says that a dozen times a day, but I feel it inside too."

"Señorita, it takes God a long time to answer prayers, sometimes," Luz said timidly, with her hand clasping Ninfa's. "We might have found each other as soon as Ninfa came, instead of waiting all this time."

"And why did he ever separate us?" Ninfa asked. "We might have grown up together, instead, and not have wasted all these years."

"Do you think the years have been wasted, Luz?" the señorita asked gravely.

"Ninfa! I would have been a Roman Catholic like you," Luz cried, startled at the thought.

"Then why was it not I, instead of Luz, who was stolen from Las Rosas, if it is such a grand thing to be a Protestant?" Ninfa asked, pouting. "*Mamá* will think that it is Luz, not I, who has been unfortunate."

"Our Father is still leading us, Ninfa," the señorita said quietly. "We cannot know why he chooses certain paths for us, but we know that he

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<sup>1</sup> Thank God.

never makes mistakes. Sometimes we ourselves seem to interfere with his plans and hinder him. Perhaps some day you will all thank him for the years that have separated you and Luz. They have taught both of you many things that might never have been learned if you had lived together."

"At any rate, we are together now," Luz said contentedly ; "only I never shall be able to think of Ninfa as my twin sister. She seems only a little girl, while I am like——"

"A great-grandmother," Ninfa added merrily. "Never mind ; perhaps I shall catch up with you, or you will grow silly and young with me. Señorita, you do not know how delightful it will be not to have to play at being sisters any more.

"You know how to pray better than I do," she said shyly to her sister as they left the room together a little later ; "will you not help me to thank the Lord ?

"Poor Justo," Ninfa whispered as they came out into the corridor again ; "he would like you, Luz, better than he does me, because you are clever. He is very clever, indeed, and he thinks I am as stupid as an old sheep." Then she stopped suddenly, catching her breath at a thought that struck her for the first time. Luz looked on in wondering surprise. Was she ever to become accustomed to this sister of the quicksilver-like moods ?

"Perhaps it was Justo who wrote the notes," Ninfa continued eagerly. "He was always like that. Instead of coming to see me he would have had me write secretly. Oh, Luz, think of it! He came here to find you, *mamá* says, and now he is ill and perhaps dead!"

Thereupon Ninfa had many things to explain to her bewildered sister. Luz had often heard of Justo Prieto, the playmate and priest, but this was the first of her knowledge of Ninfa's mysterious correspondent. Now, after reading the first note, which Ninfa had never destroyed, and then hearing the contents of the second, Luz could not help agreeing with Ninfa that no other person than the priest could have sent them. Luz was sure that the Señorita Julia would commend Ninfa's discretion and womanliness in the matter, as she herself did, but she could not help reproaching Ninfa for keeping the secret of the notes to herself.

"You did not know you had a real sister, did you, dear?" she said; "yet I think you might have told me."

They were inside of the dormitory by this time, and sitting together on the edge of Ninfa's bed. Ninfa laid her cheek against her sister's shoulder and laughed softly.

"You see, Luz Barrera, you had scolded me dreadfully when I told you about one little note received long ago, so I did not dare whisper even a

word of these others. It is true that I knew no one in Saltillo who could have written me love-letters," she added artlessly; "but I was afraid to tell you, all the same, for you might have thought that they were love-letters, you know, never having received one yourself."

At this Luz sniffed audibly with her pretty little nose, but Ninfa would not let her draw herself away, holding her tightly with both arms.

"Never mind," she whispered shyly now; "you shall see 'A. C.' for yourself some day. Is it not almost too good to be true? And Luz, I know his name now, for *mamá* has written it to me. He is Anselmo Cárdenas. Do you not think Anselmo a beautiful name?"

The news of Ninfa's finding a genuine twin in her "make-believe sister Luz" was hailed by their schoolmates as a charming bit of romance come true in every-day life.

"Luz Rubio will hold her head higher than ever now," was Carmen's ill-natured remark on hearing the news, but she was quickly quenched by little Luz Coiro, who was always ready of speech.

"There isn't any Luz Rubio, now," she retorted, unless you mean Doña Teresa's little baby that died all those years ago. And you may be thankful if Luz Barrera ever speaks to you, Carmen Diaz, after your treatment of her sometimes."

“Besides, Luz has known about it for a long time already,” quiet Raquel Uribe added ; “and I am sure no one has seen any difference in her.”

“I wonder if she will be ashamed of being a Protestant when she goes to live with the rich old lady and Ninfa,” Angela Vera mused, looking across the supper table that night at the happy faces of the twins.



## V

**I**N a large room on the ground floor of a certain house in Saltillo a priest lay dying. The front of the house opened upon the Calle Real, as the street leading past the cathedral was called, but the sick-room was in the rear, and its wide-open door and windows received the light and fresh air from the inner court of the house. The clatter of hoofs and wheels on the cobblestones of the street, and the noisy droning of the public-school boys studying their lessons aloud in a house near by, were hushed to the sick man's deafened ears.

The Señora Barrera herself would scarcely have recognized Justo Prieto in the lank figure stretched upon the narrow iron bedstead. The hollow cheeks, the lips and nostrils drawn by pain, the full brow bulging abnormally above the deeply sunken eyes, seemed but a painful caricature of the strong and intelligent features of the young priest in health.

The fever of weeks had at last burned itself out, and for twenty-four hours Justo had been kept alive only by the use of stimulants. The hot blood no longer throbbed at his heart and surged tumultuously through his veins. The heat in his brain

was gone, and a sickly pallor had taken the place of the crimson flush overspreading his face and neck. Since midnight he had been in a state of collapse, and now at noon of this first day of November, the sun's breath upon the cool air of the bedchamber had no power to remove the chill from his brow and limbs.

Justo was no longer delirious, although the mists of approaching death befogged his brain and prevented him from dwelling acutely upon the seriousness of his situation. He felt himself very weak, and he knew that this weakness was caused by extreme illness. He had had a long, bad dream, as it seemed to him, lasting through many hours of torture. He remembered vaguely having given a note to a seller of chocolate, who had promised to bring him an answer. He had gone to bed with a terrific pain in his head and must have fallen into a deep sleep, for no chocolate woman had ever returned to him with the coveted answer; only frightful dreams had haunted him, and visions of changing faces had hovered about his bed.

Once the idea had possessed him that rogues were tampering with a certain packet of letters, valuable to him for some mysterious reason, which in his dream he could not comprehend. He had fought hard for these letters, he remembered, and now they were safe, resting heavily upon his breast. At another time he had caught a glimpse of a lovely

angel, who had looked as the "blessed mother of God" might look, though her features reminded him of some one—who could it be?—of some one who had smiled upon him divinely in the golden light of an orange grove in Spain. But this fair angel had not tarried beside his bed. In her hands she had carried an open book, and on one page of the book there were pictures of playing cards, with their dazzling spots of black and red. The angel had vanished in a rosy cloud, after hovering for a brief moment in his sight, but the book had remained, as if suspended in the air, until a tall man, wearing the beard of an *americano*, had grasped it in his hands, and with a mighty effort had hurled the heavy volume upon the bed, with the words, "Take it, it is thy life!" Now as Justo lay with his brain cleared of visions, he believed that he had just awakened from a night of feverish dreams, and noticing a Mexican woman squatting in the doorway, he made a feeble noise in his throat to attract her attention.

She rose hastily and went to the bedside, offering Justo a drink of a mixture already prepared in a tumbler upon the table. Too weak to resist, the sick man gulped down a swallow of the draught, and then, in a thread of a whisper, asked the hour.

"Just past midday," the old woman answered. "And how do you feel, sir?"

"I feel I am going to be ill," Justo answered, as

before, "and I have no time for illness. There are many things to think about and I cannot remember them. Why have they let me sleep so long?"

"*Pst! Pst!* You must sleep," the woman answered, hushing him, though not unkindly. "You will be better soon."

Justo closed his eyes obediently and waited to feel better. When next he opened his eyes, the sunlight had faded from the room; lighted candles gleamed like magnified sparks through the blue mists of incense smoke. The air of the room was so heavy with the fumes and odor of burning incense that Justo gasped, then half rose in bed in a violent struggle for breath. Strong hands received him as he fell over fainting from the effort and laid him back upon the pillow. A spoonful of some burning mixture was forced down his throat, and his heart began to beat with a sudden flare of energy. He opened his eyes to find a smoothly shaven face bent close to his, and to hear a persuasive voice in his ear, saying:

"In thy extremity, my son, art thou ready to cast thyself upon the all-sufficient mercy of God, in confession of thy sins, and to receive final absolution at my hands?"

"What, am I dying?" the younger priest demanded hoarsely.

"Even so, *hijo mio*. There is no time to be lost."

A look of horror convulsed Justo's features for a second. Then it passed and he announced quietly that he was ready.

The little boy bearing the censer and several other attendants were bidden to leave the room at this moment, and the elder priest addressed himself to receiving the last confession of Justo Prieto. This priest's head was covered with a square black cap, a fringe of white hair showing below its edge. He hid his face in his hands and, kneeling, leaned his ear toward Justo's moving lips.

The confession was short and business-like. At one moment Justo made a slight movement of his hand toward the packet of letters upon his breast, but the confession was uninterrupted.

When the last words had died away upon the dying man's lips, the confessor uncovered his head in order to absolve the penitent. Recommending him to divine mercy, the *padre* stretched out his right hand over Justo and prayed God to remit his sins. Replacing his square cap, he then gave him absolution in the name of Christ Jesus, and still holding his right hand uplifted above the patient, he added that he absolved him by Christ's authority, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Then, uncovering his head the second time, he knelt and prayed that our Saviour's passion, the merits of the holy Virgin and of all the saints, might conspire to remit the penitent's sins.

Justo lay more dead than alive as the priest arrived at this stage of the preparation for his fellow-priest's entrance into another world, and it became necessary to hasten with the administration of the sacrament and extreme unction. The room again filled with those who had remained in the court outside during the moments of confession, and all fell upon their knees as the priest approached a table containing a basin of water and towels.

The attendants, meanwhile, roused the fainting sick man to slip a surplice over his shoulders, and over that a white stole, arranged crosswise over his breast. His anxious eyes pleaded for rest, and the little remaining breath came in feeble gasps at long intervals. It seemed indeed a cruel thing to rout the dying head from the pillow, and to turn and twist the exhausted frame into a fit attitude for the reception of the *viaticum*.<sup>1</sup> But the last and most mysterious journey of Justo Prieto's life was about to begin, and no precautions must be omitted to insure him a safe entrance into the new life awaiting him at its end.

A few seconds of rest were allowed him while the priest carefully washed his hands, and then, fully attired in surplice, stole, and chasuble, approached the temporary altar at one side of the room. This altar was a table covered with a clean,

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<sup>1</sup> The wafer administered at death.

white cloth, and bore two lighted tapers, besides the box containing the consecrated wafer, which was covered by a veil. Then all in the room knelt and worshiped the "host," joining the priest in a chanted Latin prayer. During the prayer the priest sprinkled the sick man and the rest with holy water. Lastly, he carefully took the consecrated wafer from the pyx, and holding it reverently between the thumb and forefinger of his right hand, with the little box held just beneath so that not a crumb should fall to the floor, he returned to the bedside.

Justo was barely able to open his mouth in obedience to his command, and even then he allowed the wafer to remain upon his trembling tongue, with no attempt at swallowing it.

The spectators held their breath in horror.

"Quick! a glass of water!" the priest exclaimed in terrified tones. "The body of our Lord will be desecrated! He must be forced to swallow it."

The dying priest still retained enough consciousness to swallow the spoonful of water poured into his mouth, and the persons around the bed gave a simultaneous sigh of relief as the short spasm in the laboring throat testified to the safety of the wafer.

The act of communion being at an end, the priest, with many genuflexions, returned the pyx to the table, brushing his finger and thumb against

its inside edge so that any crumb of wafer left sticking to them might fall into the box. Then closing the box, he replaced the veil, and leaving it upon the table, washed his finger and thumb in a tumbler of wine and water offered him by one of the attendants. More Latin prayers and anthems followed, making a harsh and mournful accompaniment to the dying gasps of the young priest.

The physician's entrance at the end of the service again emptied the room of all save the nurse and the officiating priest.

"How much longer will he last?" was the latter's question, as the doctor lifted his head from the patient's breast.

"Perhaps ten minutes, perhaps an hour, *señor padre*," was the brief reply. "If there is anything else to be done while life remains it should be done now. What are you up to, woman? Leave the man's feet alone!"

The physician strode to the foot of the bed and flung up the nurse's arm as she was in the act of replacing the bedclothes. Giving a glance of disgust at the varied contents of the foot of the bed, the physician turned on his heel and abruptly left the room. He was a Mexican and his family was Roman Catholic, but he had seen too much of life and of death to enjoy the scenes now and then witnessed by him at the end of some patient's life.

"Let a man die in peace, I say, with none of



this mummary and play-acting," he muttered angrily to himself now, as he left the room and house. "They have no pity upon a poor soul in the last struggle. Perhaps they would say it is I who have no pity." And he laughed harshly as he descended the street.

The administering of "extreme unction" was the last rite performed in the sick-room. The priest made some alteration in his outer garments, while an attendant prepared the holy oil in a convenient vessel. Beginning at the eyes, each feature of the face was anointed in turn by the priest's forefinger dipped in the oil, and lastly, the hands, feet, and limbs. Small wads of cotton were at hand for removing the oil after each application, and at the end these were all collected with care for burning. Each sinning member of the dying body being thus absolved and consecrated, more prayers followed. At length the priest and his following went away, leaving a crucifix laid on Justo's breast and outward peace in the darkening chamber.

The old woman was left alone to watch as long as it should be necessary. The images and the vials of holy water pressed closely against Justo's cold feet were not more lifeless than he seemed as he lay with half-open eyes turned toward the table upon which the candles still burned. A rudely-colored painting of the Virgin hung above this table, wreathed with green boughs and paper roses.

The watcher dozed on the doorstep and did not notice the stir upon the bed, as Justo feebly lifted his hand and pushed the weight of the crucifix from his chest. Then his hand fumbled restlessly at the fastening of his shirt.

"Clara !" he whispered ; "*hasta la muerte.*"

A few moments later the bells struck six o'clock and the nurse roused and crept toward the bed. Justo Prieto was dead, with a smile upon his lips, and his right hand firmly grasping the packet of letters lying upon his heart. The crucifix had slipped beneath the sheet.

With many crossings of herself and muttered calls upon Mary, "the refuge of dying sinners," the old woman replaced the crucifix and went out to send word to the priest that all was over.

The death chamber was then arranged with little delay, and the body of Justo Prieto, while awaiting removal to the church, lay clothed in his priestly robes, with his head freshly tonsured, and his little square cap, with a crucifix beneath, laid upon his breast.

The packet of letters was removed from the death grip with much difficulty and confided to the male attendant of the late priest, who had written more than once during Justo's illness to the Señora Barrera of Guadalajara. This attendant, before leaving the room, stopped for a moment to assort the letters and to put them into better shape, find-

ing them loosened and disarranged from their long contact with the sick man. He felt no disposition to read them. The señora had confided to him that the letters so jealously guarded by the patient were on business of no importance to any one save herself and Justo, and she had added that the sick man must not be again disturbed concerning them until he should be better.

As the man shuffled them into place and was about to tie the string more tightly about them, a photograph, wrapped carefully in white tissue paper, slipped from between the envelopes. Examination of the picture revealed a beautiful young face with melting eyes, whose tender mouth seemed about to pronounce the words, written in a fine Spanish hand on the lower margin of the card, "*A mi Justo de su Clara. Hasta la muerte. Guadalajara—Seville.*"<sup>1</sup>

The man cast a guilty look over his shoulder upon the dead priest, as he hurriedly replaced the photograph between the letters. He felt as if that grimly peaceful face were reproaching him for the glance at the picture. He himself hoped some day to take orders, and when he should be a priest he knew very well that he would not be expected to carry beautiful faces and touching legends upon his heart, whether living or dying.

Yet the criticism that arose in his mind toward

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<sup>1</sup> "To my Justo from his Clara. Until death."

this "brother" was chastened by the fact that Prieto was now infinitely beyond him in all experience, in all knowledge, in more even than what seminaries and travel could impart. He shrugged his shoulders and left the room with the packet in his pocket.

"I would leave the poor fellow his picture if I dared," he thought; "but it might be found and subjected to rougher treatment than the señora will give it. Perhaps, after all, it is the picture of a sister."

Earthly ambitions and intrigues at an end! Love *only* till death! What remained for poor Don Justo? Did his soul go out into the dark, groping among the shadows of purgatory for a vision of the woman, Mary, who was to intercede for him beyond the grave at the door of heaven, while heaven itself lay just beyond the last beat of the laboring heart, and God and his rejoicing angels would so gladly have taken him to themselves into the blessed light?

They never come back to tell us about their faring on the road between death and life, so how can we know of "the passing" of the dead? But one thing we do know, that there are those who fall asleep in Jesus, and these will God, one day, bring with him. Was Justo Prieto one of these?





A Plantation of Maguey Plants.

## VI

ON the afternoon of All Saints' Day, the first of November, several of the older school-girls had been taken by the Señorita Dora for a walk to the hill of the American fort. Most of the group of eight or ten belonged to this teacher's English class, and the expedition had been planned as a farewell jaunt before the final breaking-up of school. There had been *merienda*<sup>1</sup> of buns and fruit on the crest of the hill, a game of hide-and-seek among the crumbling mud walls of the old fort, and lastly a quiet talk together, as they rested for a while on the rocks before descending into the city.

The descent was an easy accomplishment, for the slope of the hill was very steep, and there was no question of walking down for these nimble maidens. Brown-cheeked women looked up with sympathetic interest from washing their clothes in the running streams near the foot of the hill, as the girls and their bright-eyed teacher ran merrily past in a heedless scramble down hill. Here and there, on the slope of the hill, men were at work in the late hours of the afternoon setting out a small plantation of maguey plants, and at still another point, nearer

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<sup>1</sup> Afternoon lunch.

the foot of the slope, a mud-streaked *peon* was intent upon his task of molding *adobes*, huge bricks of whitish mud, mixed with chopped straw, to be afterward dried in the sun.

Lucita's face became rather grave as she lingered for just a moment at the señorita's side, to watch the man deftly overturning the soft bricks upon the ground from the rough wooden mold in his hands.

"It reminded me of *papá*," she said softly, as they hurried on behind the girls.

When the little party at length entered the city streets, their ranks came to order again, and they continued the descent along the Calle Real, walking two by two, the Señorita Dora closing in the rear with Angela Vera at her side.

Ninfa with Lucita walked in front, and the former could not understand the gravity that had fallen upon her sister's face since they had left the crest of the hill behind them. She herself was as light-hearted as a bluebird in the spring, and the crispness of the afternoon air seemed to make her feel as if all the world should be as care-free as herself.

"Oh, look, Luz," she cried, when more than half-way down the street toward the *plaza*, "there has been a ceremony of some kind in the house across the street. Perhaps it was a baptism of some little baby, for there is the priest coming out and the attendants. Are not the little boys cunning in their white *camisas* and purple gowns?"



"Be quiet, Ninfa," Luz said quickly. "Do you not see that everybody along the street is kneeling? Some one is dying or dead in that house and the priest has just come away. No, do not kneel, Ninfa," Luz added, in an authoritative whisper. "What would the señorita say? Besides, there is no reason why you should, unless you are afraid."

"I am not afraid," Ninfa returned; but her lips were trembling and her cheeks had lost their color, as she clung closely to her sister's arm.

Their words had not been heeded by the others of the party who were too much interested in the scene on the other side of the street to have eyes for Ninfa. She happened to be the only one of them all who might have been expected to have more than a curious interest in the behavior of their fellow-pedestrians, having been accustomed from childhood to bow the knee at the passing of the "host."

The priest slowly crossed the sidewalk from the doorway of the house where Justo Prieto lay in the stupor of exhaustion, and carrying the pyx reverently in his hands entered the carriage in waiting. He was followed by two attendants, the pretty boys in their ceremonial dress, and then the coachman with bared head drove slowly away down the street toward the cathedral, one or two blocks away. Up and down the street, as far as one could see, every person except the schoolgirls and their teacher,

dropped upon reverent knees and watched the passing of the honored coach. Men took off their hats as they knelt on the stones, and women crossed themselves and ejaculated prayer sentences as their eyes followed the vehicle bearing "the veritable body of our Lord." A number of little children playing outside a door promptly plumped themselves down upon the cobble stones, in imitation of their elders, and raised laughing faces toward Ninfa and Luz as the girls walked quietly past.

The older faces, whose glances met those of this little group of "unbelievers" who refused to salute the "host," were neither laughing nor agreeable in expression. Yet nothing worse than black looks was hurled at the trespassers, and an occasional mutter of "condemned Protestants."

Ninfa, and indeed all the rest, breathed sighs of relief when the coach at length passed out of sight in turning a corner toward a side entrance of the church, and the spell was removed from the street.

"I was afraid not to kneel this afternoon, Luz mia," Ninfa confided to her sister that night at bedtime. "*Mamá* and I always kneel when we see the coachman driving in the street without a hat on his head. Oh, it is a wonderful sight, when one is in the *plaza* in Guadalajara, to see hundreds of people drop on their knees as if struck by lightning; and I have never before to-day seen any one standing as the 'host' passes by. The gentlemen

spread their handkerchiefs on the ground to kneel upon, but *mamá* does not mind soiling her silk dress when she sees our Lord passing by. Why would you not let me kneel, Luz, and why did not the señorita kneel? Did you see the ugly looks those women gave us as we passed, and one girl twitched the skirt of my dress and called me a *gringa*. Is it that the foreigners do not worship the 'host'?"

"How many questions you ask, Ninfa," Luz replied, half laughing, half serious. "I wish you would ask the señoritas half the questions you put to me. They could answer them better than I can."

"But you can tell me why you did not kneel, Luz," the other persisted.

The lights were out in the dormitory, and this conversation was carried on in the low tones suited to the hour. As usual, the two beds stood closely side by side, and what passed between the two sisters could reach other wakeful ears only as meaningless murmurs.

"Because I am a Protestant, Ninfa," was the direct reply. "We do not believe that the wafer is the real body of Jesus Christ."

"But all of you eat it, or rather, you eat broken bits of bread in the place of it," Ninfa objected. "I have been to the *Santa Cena*, at your church, you know, and have seen you eat the bread. Why do you do it, if it is not the Lord's body?"

"We do it for a remembrance of him, as he told his disciples to do, Ninfa. That is all I know about it, except that it cannot be his real body. It is only plain bread, such as we eat every day in the dining room, or if it is a wafer it is a paste of flour and water. Do you think the disciples of Jesus ate his real body, Ninfa, when they ate that last supper together?"

"Why not?" Ninfa asked innocently.

"Because he was not yet dead, child; and was sitting at the table with them eating supper. How could they have eaten bits of his body when he was still alive, foolish girl? And how can a priest, or any man, change a piece of wafer into the body of Christ by saying a few Latin words?"

"I do not know," was Ninfa's perplexed answer. "I know that *mamá* thinks they can, and we have never heard anything else. Oh, dear, it seems as if you and I have such different thoughts, Luz, about religion! I wonder if we shall ever think alike. Perhaps some day we shall quarrel and be sorry that we have ever found each other. Are sisters always like this?"

Luz clasped Ninfa in her arms and consoled her with silent caresses.

Ninfa was like a kitten in the enjoyment of loving pats and strokings, and I am not sure that she did not sometimes purposely work upon Lucita's tender feelings in order to win the petting she desired.

This was not such a time, however, for there had been a real struggle going on in Ninfa's mind for many days. Mingled with the exultant joy of these happy days there had been a sense of pain from the first at the thought that though sisters, she and Luz could never be entirely one while so divided upon one great subject.

She had no thought of trying to win Luz back to the church into which as infants they had been admitted almost eighteen years before, nor could she know that the patient sweetness of her sister's manner toward herself was due to a certain hope tapping gently at the Protestant girl's heart of what might happen some day. Yet Luz was surprised at the unexpectedly speedy answer to her prayers. The "day" was not long in coming.

"We are alike in so many other ways," Ninfa whispered a little later. "Or at least we shall be after living together for a while in our own home. We both like pretty things, and we love each other dearly, even if you are fair and I as dark as an Indian."

"As if that could make any difference!" Luz answered softly. "Go to sleep now, Ninfa, or you will be sleepy to-morrow, and stupid for the examinations."

"You are such a cat for going to sleep, Lucita," Ninfa retorted petulantly. "Just when we get to an interesting part of our talking at night, you

always turn over and say, 'Go to sleep, Ninfa, or you will be stupid.' I am 'stupid' whether asleep or not; Justo always called me so."

"Well, you are cross now," Luz replied drowsily, "so I shall go to sleep and leave you."

She turned her head on the pillow as she spoke and composed herself for sleep, with her arms crossed above her head.

Released from her sister's embrace, Ninfa also pretended to sleep, and Luz was falling into her first doze when she heard a heartbroken sob, and in another moment was making distressed efforts to discover what ailed the excitable child at her side.

"If the color of my skin does not make any difference, something else does," Ninfa said brokenly at last. "You never will love me enough while you are a Protestant and I a Catholic."

"Would you like me to be a Catholic, little sister?" Luz asked in troubled tones.

"No! no!" was the smothered reply; "but I could be a Protestant, could I not, Luz?"

"Darling, what would your grandmother say and do to you if you should become a Protestant?" Luz asked fearfully, with hope thumping wildly at her heart's doors now.

"Angela says that she would be ashamed to be a Protestant," Ninfa continued in a more composed voice; "but I should be only a little afraid, I think, not ashamed. *Mamá* would be angry, perhaps, but

she loves me too well to hurt me, and then you and I would be alike, Lucita; don't you see? We cannot be real twins unless I am a Protestant too, and *mamá* will rejoice so much over having us together that she will forgive us both."

Luz was a little chilled by Ninfa's words and hardly knew how to reply. She was quite sure that no one would be admitted into a Protestant church for such a reason as Ninfa had suggested, the making "real twins" of two sisters divided by their religious creeds.

"You are not sleepy now, are you?" Ninfa continued. "Listen, how quiet everything is. Luz Coiro is snoring, but that is all the noise there is, and you and I are like two owls chatting together in the dark. Your eyes look like owls' eyes, tonight, Luz; does your head ache?"

"No, but I wish you would be quiet, Ninfa, if you have said all you have to say and are not going to cry any more."

"Now it is you who are cross," Ninfa exclaimed, "and I thought you would be glad to hear about my being a Protestant."

"You cannot be a Protestant just because you want to be like me, Ninfa," Luz said solemnly, resigning herself to another discussion with her sister.

"But that is only one reason, Luz. I will tell you the others. For one thing, I love to read the

Bible as you and the señoritas do, and I like the Protestant worship better than the Catholic because I understand every word of it. Then I have not prayed to the Virgin Mary for six weeks, and I do not believe that priests ought to make people confess their sins to them when they are like other men and often sin themselves. And I believe what you told me to-night about the sacrament, that it is not the Lord's real body. Now," she ended, "is not that something like being a Protestant?"

Luz was puzzled to know what to reply.

"That is the way we believe about those things, Ninfa," she answered after a moment; "but there is something more, I am sure. I do not believe that the pastor would be satisfied with just that much and no more."

"Lean your ear close to my mouth, Lucita dear," Ninfa whispered; "there is something more to tell you."

Then she repeated, word for word, the verses written upon the forget-me-not card given her long ago by the missionary teacher in Guadalajara.

"I know now," she went on, "that God wants everybody to be saved, and that Christ is the only intercessor. Last Sunday, in the class, I was wondering in my mind how people are saved, and the Señorita Dora began right away to teach us a verse. This was it, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.' I do believe on the Lord



Jesus Christ, Luz, and so I shall be saved. Now am I not a Protestant?" she ended, with a half-frightened catch in her voice and covering her head with the bedclothes.

"O Ninfa, you are if you believe!" Luz exclaimed joyfully; "and now we shall be 'real twins,' as you say. To-morrow we will go to the señorita and tell her all about it."

"Is it not a good thing to be sisters?" Ninfa asked, after a moment or two of awed silence between them. "I am so glad you did not die when you were a little baby lying on the floor of that dreadful house. Doña Teresa was a good woman to take care of you and nurse you. I wish our mother had not died; poor little mother! Do you believe that her ghost is walking about to-night, Luz, and *papá's*? *Mamá* says that dead people's ghosts walk about the earth on the night of All Saints. I should think our mother and father would be glad to come here now and find us together."

"Perhaps they know about it without coming here," Luz answered; "and I think that it is only a superstition that makes people believe that ghosts walk about on this night. The Señorita Julia says that the spirits of the dead may be with us all the time, as God is, but she is not sure about it."

"I like to think about good spirits, but not about the bad ones, Luz." And Ninfa shuddered, cud-

dling close at her sister's side. "It looks cold and dark out of doors, and I am glad we have locks on our doors now, though I do not suppose locks could keep spirits out."

After a little more talk together, the girls finally dropped off to sleep, a little while before the bells tolled midnight.

If any spirit walked that night in the silence of that sleeping chamber, it was the great spirit of Love, I think, and his soft footfalls must have lingered beside the two little beds drawn close together in the corner. Whether the Vicente and the Manuela of long ago really overlooked their twin children as they slept, is not for me to say.

Ninfa and Luz were united at last, as no elaborate intrigue of any priest's designing could have effected. The hand of God, with finger pointed straight ahead, ever leads his children on to their inheritance of his joy and peace.

The next morning, before the sun looked over the walls of the institute building into the cleanly swept court, the Señorita Julia left her room and walked slowly toward the hydrant with her empty water-pitcher in her hand. Suddenly, as she stood upon the wet stones by the water pipe, she felt a touch upon her arm and, starting nervously, found Luz and Ninfa standing at her side. Their faces were turned to the eastern sky, but they shone with something more than a reflection of its brightness.

"Twin morning stars, good-day to you," the teacher cried in quick response to their soft-voiced salutations. "What early birds you are!"

"We have been waiting for you for a long time, señorita," Luz explained while the water splashed unnoticed from the overflowing pitcher at the spout. "We have something to tell you, and we wished to see you before the rest of the girls came about."

Ninfa deftly turned off the water, and taking the pitcher from the señorita's hand, ran nimbly off with it to set it down at the chamber door. She looked pleadingly at Luz as she tripped away, and the sister understood.

"It is about Ninfa," she said to the señorita, who had waited to hear what was to follow Lucita's first words. "*Señorita mia*, she is a Protestant in her heart, and we wish to know if she may not join with us before we go away from Saltillo."

The señorita sat quickly down upon the step of the fountain and motioned the girls to a seat, one on each side of her, for Ninfa had shyly returned, and was watching her face in silent expectancy.

"What are you saying, señorita?" Luz asked presently, as the teacher's lips moved voicelessly, while her eyes were fixed upon the floating cloud-lets above the court.

"I was thanking the Lord for his goodness, and asking his forgiveness for my unbelief," was the reply. "Ah, girls, never distrust him for one mo-

ment, when you have asked his help. Last night I scarcely slept at all, and this morning I left my room with my heart as heavy as lead. I thought of the end of the session, and of the girls who might never return to our care, and it seemed to me that I had been a very unfaithful child of my Father, while all the Latin and history and arithmetic that I had been able to teach you, seemed of no value in comparison with what might have been learned of the Saviour's life and death, and his love for sinners. Now God himself has been opening the eyes of one at least of our dear girls, and I need not have worried all last night over Ninfa and Angela and the rest." She put her arm around Ninfa as she spoke and pressed her to her side. "Tell me, dear child, all about it," she urged.

When the simple story had been told, much as it had been heard by Luz during the previous night, the señorita asked Ninfa a few tender but searching questions as to her convictions and her intentions for the future. These were answered so readily, and with such childlike trust in the Saviour's power to forgive and save, that the señorita was satisfied of Ninfa's earnestness and courage.

"I do not believe that I shall be afraid of *mamá* now," she ended, "because even telling you and Luz about it has made it seem more real and true."

"What will you say to her, Ninfa?" Luz asked, with sober lips.

"I shall write and tell her that I find we have been mistaken about the Protestants, and that they teach the truth of the Bible. I shall ask her if I may join the church of the *americanos* here, and then when she comes I shall tell her more about what it means."

"And if the Señora Barreda forbids your joining with us and leaving the Roman Catholic Church, Ninfa?" the teacher asked.

"I shall do it all the same," was the quiet reply, "and *mamá* will not think me disobedient when once she hears all about it. I shall read my Bible to her, you see, and as *mamá* is very clever indeed, she will see the mistakes that are made by those who do not read it." A week passed, however, and Ninfa's letter, bearing to the grandmother the news of her momentous decision, was still unanswered. The truth was that the señora had been seriously affected by the priest's death, the tidings of which had been received at about the same time as Ninfa's news. Mingled superstition and remorse at the thought of the part she had unwittingly played in bringing about poor Justo's end, somewhat weakened the impression made upon her mind by her granddaughter's letter. Perhaps she did not altogether realize what the words "joining the Protestants" might mean when penned by the

hand of her little one. How improved was her handwriting, and how well turned were the sentences of the earnest little letter !

"After all I did well in sending the girl to the Americans," the señora mused, in the midst of her self-reproachings concerning Justo's fate. "The school is all that Justo declared it, and surely I shall be able to command or coax all nonsense about the new religion out of Ninfa's head when once I have her, with her sister, in my own house again, and out of the way of the *protestantes*."

The session being so nearly at an end, and the grandmother's silence continuing, it was judged by Ninfa's advisers unnecessary to longer await the señora's expressed opinion concerning the matter.

A few days before the closing exercises of the institute, therefore, Ninfa Barrera confessed in public her faith in Christ as the Saviour of her soul, and the only mediator between God and man, renouncing forever the church in which she had been reared. She was not alone that bright Sunday morning in choosing whom she would serve, for Angela Vera joined with her in her vows of obedience and faithfulness to the Lord.

"I am not ashamed now," Angela whispered, as she walked homeward from the morning service at Ninfa's side.

"Nor am I so much afraid of *mamá*," Ninfa replied, with unusual gentleness.

Carmen Diaz, walking just in front of the two girls, carried her glossy black head a trifle higher than usual, and pretended to be very much interested in all that was going on in the *plaza*, as the long line of girls, two by two, strolled quietly under the trees, but who shall say that her girlish heart was untouched by the scene just witnessed in the little church behind them? Many a grave thought is belied by laughing lips and sparkling eyes, but the Searcher of hearts is never deceived, and his guiding hand often lies heavy upon the merry of mien.

## VII

ON the twenty-fifth day of November, the blue mountain peak in the east peered over the low roof the Madero Institute into an empty court and silent corridors. The busy hum of voices in the long schoolrooms was hushed for the vacation season, and the brewery doves had the fountain to themselves at last. Fearlessly they plumed themselves and strutted with swelling breasts, lifting their pink feet gingerly from the hot curbing, or balanced their plump bodies on the brink to lave their small heads in the flashing water. Their jeweled necks gleamed in the morning sunlight and their cooing notes made harmonious accord with the musical tinkle of the falling drops.

The last crash of the piano keys had sounded there two nights before, when all the town had assembled in the wide court under the temporary roof of canvas, to hear the concert and the recitations given by the girls, and to witness the delivery of the diplomas by the governor of the State. The last notes of the beautiful air, "*La Golondrina*," played by a Mexican band, had swept through the emptying corridors at a little before midnight, and the last day of the session had ended.



Carriages had rolled away from the institute doors at all hours of the following day, filled with girls and boxes, and although sighs and lamentations had accompanied each departure, their ghosts no longer lingered in the echoing corners of the corridors.

In the spacious parlor of the institute, several persons were gathered for a farewell talk on this quiet morning. The Señorita Julia was there, shivering a little in the cold room, having just left a merry blaze on her chamber hearth ; the Señorita Dora's slender figure was almost lost in the wide embrace of one of the great Austrian rocking-chairs. Near by sat the Señora Barreda, with a granddaughter on each side of her. The señora had enjoyed the hospitality of the institute for a day and a night after the final exercises, and the three were now waiting for the carriage which was to carry them to the railroad station. Breakfast was just over, and the train for the south would leave at half-past nine o'clock.

Teresa, with Pepito in her arms as usual, sat crouching on the stones outside of the open parlor door. Her eyes were red with weeping, and her head hung upon her breast.

"She is going away, Pepito," the woman whispered once into the boy's ear ; "Lucita will never come back again. Thou hast lost thy *papá*, thou hast lost thy sister, and we are all alone, Pepito.

And Lucita will never, never, teach a roomful of *niñas*."

"A-goo! A-goo!" Pepito remarked gayly, giving an encouraging poke at his mother's eyes with his little brown fist. His remark being freely interpreted may have meant:

"But the señora will send for thee and me, *mamacita*, and we shall live happily together ever after."

At any rate, Teresa thanked the little one with smothering kisses, imprisoning his tiny fists in one motherly palm, so his words must have been of a consoling nature.

In the meantime, the Señorita Dora, from the depths of her rocking-chair, was telling the Señora Barrera that she could not bear the thought that Luz and Ninfa might never again return to the institute, and Lucita's eyes had filled with ready tears at her words. The señora again explained her reasons for her decision not to send her granddaughters from home for another year at school. Although her reasoning seemed simple enough, even Ninfa guessed at something hidden behind the mere desire of keeping her sister and herself under the grandmotherly eye.

"I think you know that Luz has been for some years a member of the Protestant church, señora," the Señorita Julia remarked, with some diffidence, after a pause. It seemed best that there should be

a clear understanding with this stately lady concerning the girls' position, before they should leave the school, and the señorita, after some uncertainty of mind, had resolved to probe the señora's sentiments upon the matter.

"That is only natural, I am sure," was the courteous reply. "If she had been reared with Ninfa, she would have been as we are. As those who took her from us became Protestants while Luz was still a child, it is natural that she should be what she is."

This remark was made in so composed a tone, and was accompanied by a smiling glance at Luz of such certainty of possession that the señorita's heart sank.

"Luz will always be what she is now, I think," she said with a friendly nod in the direction of the chair, where Luz sat pale and nervous.

"We shall see," the señora replied easily. "There will be no quarrel between us, I think, if Luz does her duty and remembers that her grandmother has already suffered many sorrows on her account. Once at home in her own rightful place, the blood of her fathers will assert itself, and she will become what we are, in many things besides religious belief. I do not mean to disparage your religion, my dear señorita," she added politely. "We have been reared differently, you see, that is all, and we have different customs. Religion is

little more than a custom, if you will think of it in that way, and it is not so difficult to change our customs of life and belief when we are young, as it is when we grow old. You who are teachers of the young will comprehend my meaning, I am quite sure. Indeed, one of Ninfa's last letters has prepared me for some fancied change in herself, innocent little one !”

“But, señora—*mamá*, you do not understand, I think,” Luz remonstrated, roused at last to speak for herself. “I can never change my belief. I shall die a Protestant. Oh, please do not be angry with me !” she added, for the señora's smile faded, and a frown puckered her brow, at her granddaughter's very plain speech. “I have not said it well, but I cannot bear to have you think that I can ever be different.”

The señora again forced a smile, and managed to be gracious in her reply toward this surprising granddaughter.

“We need not consume these last precious moments with your kind teachers with needless discussion, Luz,” she said. “When we arrive at home, Ninfa and I will show you some matters in a different light. Then there will be opportunity for your assertions of independence of belief.”

Her look was indulgent again now, but the señoritas understood very well the policy of the señora's present moderation.

All this time Ninfa had been uneasy enough, changing color more than once, while wrapping and unwrapping the long fringe of the *rebozo* about her nervous fingers.

"Ninfa understands me," the grandmother continued, with a loving pat upon the girl's shoulder. "We have lived together for almost eighteen years now, and she will teach her sister that there is a higher will than hers in the home."

"There is a higher will than that of any man or woman, and it rules the world," the Señorita Julia said solemnly. "We who acknowledge that will must obey it."

"I know," was the even reply; "but with my children there is none higher than my own. I, as older and wiser than they, represent the will of God for them. It is for them to obey me."

"But, *mamá*," Ninfa began, with tear-filled eyes and quivering chin, "I wrote you that I also believe——"

"What your grandmother believes; of course you do, child!" The señora's chin was firmly set as she spoke, yet her eyes rested tenderly upon her darling.

The tears were rolling down Ninfa's cheeks and she trembled in every limb. She looked helplessly at Luz, and then buried her face in her hands. Luz was sorely distressed and looked to the Señorita Julia for assistance for both Ninfa and herself.

"I think Ninfa wished to tell you that she has learned some things since she has been with us, which——"

"Of course she has," the grandmother interrupted her, with suspicious promptness very unlike her usual courtesy. "Have I not expressed my gratification at her progress in music, and was she not the nightingale of the concert, night before last? In English too, she has progressed well, the Señorita Dora assures me. What more can I say of my satisfaction than I have already said?"

"*Mamá*," Ninfa began again in a distressed tone, lifting her wet face from her hands, "I do not wish to offend you. Some other time I will tell you what I mean ; perhaps when we are at home again. I wrote, you know——" Her head dropped and she did not again look at Luz or her teachers.

Teresa appeared in the doorway at that instant, announcing the carriage, and the last farewells had to be said.

"Be good to our sweet girl, señora," the Señorita Julia pleaded, as the señora settled her skirts on the back seat of the carriage opposite the twins. "Ninfa is timid, but she always wishes to do what is right. Will you not help her, even if her way be not yours? And Luz will need your love and sympathy, more even than Ninfa, perhaps. *Por el amor de Dios, señora*, be careful how you oppose their consciences."

The señora grew restless under these parting words, and at the end replied with forced gayety :

"It is easy to see that you know nothing of a grandmother's heart, Señorita Julia. It is my desire to do my whole duty by my daughters. As to consciences, I have my own. *Adios, señoritas*, may God stay with you !"

"And may he go with you, dear children," the teachers sighed, as they re-entered the iron gates, and arm in arm paced the lonely corridors to their own doors.

Surely Guadalajara had never been so fragrant and so fair as on the afternoon which returned Ninfa and Luz to their southern home. The warm sunlight still bathed the broad banana leaves in the *plaza*, and gilded the peaked roof of the little music-pavilion in the center, as the family carriage rolled past.

Opposite the *plaza* rose the cool, gray walls of the city palace, flanked by towers at both street corners. If Luz had understood Latin, her fast-beating heart might have been stilled by the reading of the motto traced in stone about these towers : "*Nisi Dominus custodieret civitatem, frustra vigilat qui custodit eam*," "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain."

The letters were large and plain, but the carriage rolled rapidly, and, moreover, Luz did not

know Latin. Both girls grew silent as they neared the end of the short drive from the station, and the clear color had left Lucita's cheeks, as the carriage at length rumbled under the portico of the Casa Barrera and entered the courtyard within.

The Señora Barrera alighted first, while Pedro and the other servants hovered around the carriage, voluble in their exclamations of delight and admiration over the travelers.

Something in the half-frightened, half-imploring expression upon Lucita's face, as she stepped from the carriage and into her arms, reminded the señora of the look with which Vicente had once met her on the threshold of El Dorado, almost twenty years before. Hand in hand with his bride he had come toward his mother, and she remembered how her heart had frozen against them both, and with pain recalled the hurt quiver of her boy's lips as he had led his wife past her and into the house.

She felt that she must, for her son's sake, bring a smile to the fair, awestruck face.

"Luz, darling," she whispered, "only love me, as your *papá* loved his mother, and I promise that you shall be happy in my home, which is yours also."

There was not much left of the day when the travelers had refreshed themselves after the long journey, and Ninfa and Luz were far too weary to lie awake after going to bed that night.



On the homeward way Ninfa had pleaded with her grandmother to be allowed to share her room with Luz, but had been firmly refused. With all the unused rooms in the great house, the señora was determined that each girl should have a room especially adapted to her complexion and tastes.

During the weeks of waiting for the homecoming, the grandmother had entertained herself in the lonely hours with planning these apartments for the reception of the twins. Therefore Ninfa's bedroom had been renovated from ceiling to floor. There was now a pink bloom upon the walls, and pink rosebuds blushed on drapery and ribbons, while new white rugs replaced the old ones.

Though on being introduced into this dainty bower Ninfa stoutly declared that the pink and white room suited the gray-eyed Luz even better than it did herself, she had to agree with the grandmother that the blue room next was an even fairer setting for her sister.

Luz was awakened the next morning by Maria's hand laid gently upon her arm. The muslin curtains of her little brass bedstead had been put back, and Maria's smiling face appeared between.

"It is nine o'clock, Señorita Luz," was the woman's greeting, "and here is your coffee. I have just carried the Señorita Ninfa hers, and she wishes to know if you are awake."

A small china tray containing a smoking cup of

black coffee and a roll stood on a table at the bedside, and Luz was roused to open-eyed wonder at these luxurious proceedings. She found a pretty dressing-sacque of Ninfa's thrown across the foot of the bed, and with Maria's assistance she was soon enjoying its warmth about her shivering shoulders, while the steaming coffee finished the task of thoroughly awakening her. Presently Ninfa came running in with her high-heeled slippers clacking noisily on the tiled floor. They dressed at leisure, and it was not until breakfast, at twelve o'clock, that they met their grandmother.

The rest of the day was filled with busy talk, in the corridor, of the many dresses to be made for Luz, of the new piano to be bought for Ninfa, of the books that the more learned little granddaughter might need, of poor Justo's death, of plans for bringing Teresa and Pepito to the South, where the mother might end her days and the little son grow to manhood among their own people.

Chocolate and small cakes were served beside the couch where the señora rested during the afternoon, and when the glowing sunshine had departed, leaving the corridors dim and chill, the dinner hour arrived. The evening was passed quietly, with no callers from the outside world.

In this same serene fashion several days were spent in the Casa Barrera. By and by, perhaps, there would be invitations issued to a few select

friends, who would gladly come to be introduced to the new granddaughter, for Ninfa and Luz were now of an age to see something of the world.

Yet in planning for the coming winter, in the days before her visit to Saltillo, the señora had found herself shrinking more and more from the idea of an active society life. The temperate years of the past had preserved the robustness of her constitution, so that now, at the age of sixty, she had much of the strength and fire of forty, yet she shrank, not unnaturally, from re-entering the world with the responsibility upon her of two young women who could not fail to be attractive.

Of all the household Maria, the maid, was the first to deplore the sober state of things promised by the señora's delay in inviting the first guests of the season. It was a great pity, she grumbled to herself, that her young ladies should have to be caged during the whole season of balls and of theatre-going, and then perhaps be whisked off to be buried in the dust of the *hacienda*.

How would the señora ever find husbands for the señoritas, or rather, how would the señors of Guadalajara ever hear of the merry Ninfa and the gentle Luz, who neither rode nor walked abroad, and who went to mass no more, being always chained to an old lady's arm-chair? Maria, being a young Mexican woman herself, might have known better.

## VIII

THE first Sunday at home came and passed with no mention of church-going by any one. Since that moment of repression in the parlor of Madero Institute, Ninfa had not seemed to find a suitable occasion for the promised explanation to her grandmother, and her red lips had been sealed upon the subject, even with Luz. It had usually been Ninfa who had introduced their little arguments and discussions, and now that they slept apart, there was not given them the same opportunity for heart confidences. Luz had always been somewhat in subjection to Ninfa's swiftly varying moods, and was unwilling now to force her sister's confidence, though she was ready to receive it whenever Ninfa should offer it.

On her own part a small ache in her heart was fast growing into a pain. She had no desire to discuss questions of conscience or religion with her grandmother, for at the best of times she shrank from speaking of her most sacred thoughts, yet she found herself missing something now in the life of ease opening before her. Perhaps this lack came in part from the actual emptiness of what had been busy and studious hours for her. It had been im-

possible to study during the first week at home. Yet the real ache came from the knowledge of the entire misunderstanding of herself by those associated with her in this new home.

She knew that there must come a time of reckoning when the señora would learn that no measures, gentle or otherwise, could bring her granddaughters to think as she did about certain matters. Luz began to long feverishly for this time to come, and she had hoped much from this first Sunday. It would be easy to say :

“No, *mamá*, you must not ask us to go to mass with you. You know I told you that I could not believe as you do about some things. I am a Protestant, and I would like to go to the Protestant *culto*<sup>1</sup> to-day.”

She was sure that Ninfa would have the courage to join in then and add her pleadings to her own, for Ninfa knew the house where one of the *cultos* was held each Sunday, and they had long ago talked together of asking the little fair señora to take them into her class some day. But no occasion was given Luz to make her speech to her grandmother.

The morning passed as every other had passed, except that Luz rose an hour earlier than usual, and was already dressed when Ninfa ran in, according to custom, to chat over their coffee cups. Luz

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<sup>1</sup> Service.

had remarked that it was Sunday, and Ninfa had replied with a flush upon her cheeks that she knew it, and that she was not altogether a coward, for she would be brave very soon, if only Luz would not speak a word to her about it.

The señora was as affectionate as usual at the breakfast hour when it was much too late to speak with her about the Protestant service. Luz wished now that she had done so the night before, when her grandmother had been in a particularly happy frame of mind over the completion of a blue silk frock for Luz; but Sunday had come, after all, before she was well aware of its approach, and nothing had been said.

"Why should I send them away from me, when I have been so long without them?" the señora had asked herself, as she lay in bed, late into the forenoon, with a dull and aching head. "No, no! mass can wait till they have become accustomed to being at home again. I will not force Luz to anything. Years have taught me that letting-alone is a very powerful instrument in the right hands."

The girls were not long in learning that a severe headache had kept their grandmother from attending early or later mass, that morning, while she in her turn expressed great gratification on hearing that they had spent the morning hours in reading.

During the afternoon that followed, callers dropped in to congratulate the señora on her re-

turn from Saltillo and to be introduced to the new granddaughter.

A bright-eyed old lady, the maiden sister of the lawyer Cárdenas, especially interested Luz. She had full opportunity for studying the comfortable looking figure and smiling face, whose gaze was constantly fixed upon Ninfa, sitting demurely at her grandmother's side.

"She does not even see me," thought Luz, "for she has eyes only for Ninfa. If Anselmo be only as good-tempered as his aunt seems to be I am sure I shall like him. How sweet Ninfa looks in her red velvet jacket! If Anselmo could see her now!"

When all the visitors were gone and dinner was over, the señora again led the way to the *sala*.

"Come, girls," she said pleasantly. "You have had a long idle day together, except for your reading of the early morning. Sit one on each side of me, here on the sofa, and let me hear what you read. Afterward Luz will read aloud to us and Ninfa will sing before we retire. My headache still lingers, my children, and you must soothe and amuse me." The señora's face was indeed pale, and she pressed her forehead with her open palm.

"No, first you shall read to me, Lucita," she added changing her mind as her eye fell upon a large pamphlet on a table. "I have something here that will interest you both. Bring me the

paper-covered book from the table, Ninfa. Yes, that is it, '*La Madre de Dios en Mejico.*'<sup>1</sup>

"You see the illustrations, children. They are very good, done in bright colors, and representing many of the phases of the blessed Mary. I am sorry I have not all of the book. This much was lent me by Doña Marguerita Cárdenas. Read, Luz, beginning at the introduction. That seems to be particularly appropriate."

Luz took the pamphlet into her hands and glanced down the first page. Then she looked up to find her grandmother leaning her head against the back of the sofa with her eyes closed. Ninfa gave Luz an encouraging nod and formed the word "read," with her lips, while her eyes sparkled in the candle-light.

"I am waiting, Luz," the señora exclaimed. "Is there not enough light to read by?"

"Certainly, *mamá*, and I am ready to begin now."

Then she read :

"Much more than a century ago, one of the most enthusiastic panegyrists of the marvelous image of the most Holy Virgin of Guadalupe, referring to the numberless demonstrations of especial predilection which Divine Providence has made toward Mexico, said the following: 'These are so many and so great that it would be necessary to number them by the dozens, because the Holy, Miraculous

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<sup>1</sup> "The Mother of God in Mexico," by Antonio Maria de Padua.



images with which God in his inexhaustible goodness has seen fit to favor us, are in such multitudes that even those who possess them are prone to ignore them : and I believe that it would not be possible to make a more acceptable offering to our country than to write the history of the Images which Mexico owes to God, and of the benefits which she has received from them ; material, in my judgment, so copious that bulky volumes would not suffice to contain them, so great has been the mercy with which his Divine Majesty has been willing to look upon us, giving us in them [the Images] a shield against all classes of evils and pestilence, and remedy and relief for all our necessities and miseries and afflictions.'

"From the remote epoch in which the above was uttered, no one, so far as we know, has undertaken the formation of the history which to-day we pretend to sketch with as great piety and good faith as want of merits and qualities for so colossal an enterprise : but not for this shall we abandon our purpose ; we do not write for the wise, nor for the philosophic, whose most sacred sentiments of the soul are asleep or dead ; we write for those who, firm in the religion of our ancestors, live in the boundless world of faith, and who pure of soul and simple of heart, seek in virtue the path which is to lead us to eternal salvation, and who see in the powerful inroads of modern ideals, a manifest tendency to make humanity more sordid, depriving it of *the only real consolation in adversity, faith in the majestic religion of the Divine Martyr of Golgotha.*

"In Mexico more than in any other——"

"There!" the señora exclaimed restlessly, "that is enough for now. The reading makes me nervous. How do you like it, Luz?"

"What he says about images is all false, I am sure, *mamá*," was the brave reply; "and it is belief in them that deprives men of 'the only real consolation in adversity, faith in the majestic religion of the Divine Martyr of Golgotha,' who was Jesus Christ."

"Those last words are like my verse, 'Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved,'" Ninfa added with a beating heart. "The words are different, but they mean the same thing, don't you think so, *mamá*?"

Thereupon, the señora opened her eyes and desired to know what Ninfa meant by her "verse," and on learning that the Bible had supplied the text, she sat up again, straight enough now, and seemed to forget all about her headache.

"Was it the *Santa Biblia*, then, that you were reading this morning?" she asked, turning flashing eyes upon Luz, and extending her arm, as if to push the girl from her. "Have you dared to read that book, when we are solemnly warned against looking within its covers? Go," she commanded, without allowing Luz to reply, "bring me the book instantly." Luz rose to obey, but the señora grasped her blue silk skirt and forced her to pause.

"I remember that you are my granddaughter," she said with stern calmness, "and I knew that you

were a Protestant. I did not believe, however, that you would dare to read the Bible in my house, and I assure you that you have read it now for the last time. The time has come to pull out this poisonous fang by the roots. I will have none of it in my house. Go, bring the book."

"*Mamá*, shall I bring mine too? I have one, and I shall not let Luz be scolded when I have done all that she has done," Ninfa exclaimed, with some indignation. "Yes, I bought one at the institute with my own money, and if I bring it to you, you must promise not to harm it."

"Who gave you the money, wretched child?" the señora demanded. "Was it not my money, and am I not forever disgraced by such trickery? Go after your sister and bring me all the Bibles in your possession."

When the twins returned they found their grandmother erect and alert, and with the stern eyes of a relentless judge. "Lay the books on the table there," she said impressively. "Are you sure that you have brought them all?"

"We have but one Bible apiece, *mamá*," Luz answered sadly.

"That is well. Now kneel, both of you, here on the rug and ask my pardon for committing this error. Perhaps when you have humbled yourselves before me, the blessed Virgin will hear your prayers and grant you absolution after penance."

To the horror of Luz, Ninfa fell upon her knees as commanded. Her whispered words to her sister as they had hurriedly caught up their Bibles had been so like the old, daring Ninfa, that Luz had hoped better things of her than this quick yielding to the grandmother's unreasonable demand.

"It is all right, Luz," Ninfa had whispered. "It had to come, you know, and it will soon be over. I am not afraid now, are you?"

Yet now Ninfa was on her knees to ask pardon for having done no wrong thing at all. Would she be kneeling before the marble image of Mary next?

The señora's eyes were fixed on Ninfa, and she did not notice that Luz remained standing. The pain seemed to have returned to her head, and there was a confused expression upon her face. Perhaps she was willing to have to do first with the girl whose yielding nature was better known to her.

"*Mamá*, I have often gotten down on my knees before you, when I have been naughty, haven't I?" Ninfa said coaxingly, clasping her hands on the lady's lap. "Don't you remember how you used to make me do it, when I had been saucy or cross, when I was a little bit of a girl at El Dorado? Luz never learned to do so, you know, because we lost her. That is why she does not kneel down now. Come, Luz, get down here by me, and I will tell *mamá* all about it."

The señora laid her right hand upon the dark

head of her most dearly loved granddaughter and idly wondered to feel it tremble constantly as she held it there.

Luz kneeled by Ninfa, having no idea of what was to follow. She had never understood this little sister, she thought.

"We have not been really naughty this time, *mamá*," Ninfa went on. "At least, Luz has not. I have been a little cowardly, afraid to tell you about my Bible, but I know Luz was not afraid. No, *mamá*, let me talk first; but may we sit on the little footstools now? It always makes me giddy to kneel on the floor, you know, even at mass."

As the grandmother made no objection to this change of position, the girls drew the footstools close to the señora's knees and sat down.

"Now we are more comfortable," Ninfa said softly, grasping one of her grandmother's hands. "How cold your hand is, *mamá*, and how it trembles! Are you ill?"

"No, no, child, go on with what you were saying. I do not think you have asked my pardon yet," and the señora tried in vain to make her voice stern, yet there was no smile upon her lips. She extended her other hand to Luz, saying with a troubled break in her voice: "I love you both, my children, but I do not wish to make a mistake. You must submit to my will where you are too inexperienced to choose for yourselves."

"But we have already chosen, *mamá*," Ninfa replied, pressing her warm lips upon the chill old hand in hers. "Luz and I read the Bible because it is God's book, and it tells us that he loves us and will save us for Jesus' sake."

"What do you say?" the señora stammered. "You still speak of reading the Bible? Ninfa, my child, get up—go away—do anything but tell me that you are really like Luz and the *gringas* with whom I talked in Saltillo. I could not bear that, Ninfa."

"But I must tell you, *mamá*. I am like them, because I do believe what they believe. It is not so very different from what you think, dearest *mamá*, if you will only listen. Oh, do not look at me like that!"

"*Protestante!*" the señora hissed between her teeth, dropping the hands of her granddaughters and flinging her own above her head. "Justo was right. I sent my child into danger and I have lost her more certainly than I lost her sister seventeen years ago."

"No years will ever give my daughters back to me now," she wailed hysterically, while the girls kept a startled silence. "Ah, if Justo were here, he would know how to comfort me. I have no longer a desire to live, for I am alone in the world—the world that was to grow young and beautiful for me with my children." Her eyelids drooped,

her gray head fell over upon her shoulder, and her lips ceased their lament.

"Luz, we have killed our grandmother," Ninfa cried passionately, clinging to her sister and shaking from head to foot.

"Perhaps she has only fainted, Ninfa ; call Pedro and the others and we will lay her down. Quick, Ninfa !"

"The good God would not let us kill her, would he, Luz?" Ninfa asked a little later, when the servants had exhausted all their resources and the señora was still unconscious.

"I do not know, Ninfa," was the troubled reply ; "when the doctor comes he may be able to do something more. I do not believe that she is dead though, because every now and then I can feel something like a little heart-beat."

"Do you think the Lord's hand is in this, Luz?" Ninfa whispered, a moment or two afterward. "The señorita said that his hand rules the world. If I thought that he has made *mamá* like this I could bear it, but I never could live a minute if I thought I had killed *mamá*."

"I believe like the señorita, Ninfa," Luz answered softly, through her tears. "I think God has done it, for we were only trying to do what was right, and he could never punish us so dreadfully."

## IX

WHEN the Señora Barrera recovered consciousness, after long hours of apparently deathlike sleep, she opened her eyes upon the anxious faces of her granddaughters. The physician was standing by the lamp examining the tiny thermometer in his hand, and did not see the slow smile relaxing the rigid features of the gray old face.

"Ah, *chulitas*, what has happened?" the grandmother asked feebly. "Is it already morning, and have I overslept myself? Surely something was wrong. I cannot remember clearly what it was, for my head is heavy. Ah, yes, I know," and she closed her eyes, while her lips trembled piteously.

The doctor had stepped quickly to the bedside on hearing the sick woman's voice, and remained watching her face, just out of her sight.

"Speak to her," he whispered to Luz.

"*Mamá*, are you better?" the girl asked, stooping to smooth away a tumbled wave of the gray hair from her grandmother's forehead.

"I am well, of course, little one, but I feel strangely tired. Call Maria, Lucita, that I may rise and dress. Hey! what is the matter with my leg and arm? Help me up, Ninfa."



"Oh, what is it, Dr. Benitez?" Ninfa cried, terror-stricken, turning to the doctor as her grandmother, after making ineffectual efforts to rise from her pillow, sank back motionless upon the bed.

"Paralysis, my child," the physician replied. "Your grandmother has received a stroke, and has no use of her right limbs. I feared it as soon as I saw her. You may thank God and the saints that she has retained her speech and reason."

"Why are you here, señor; and who are you to be putting yourself thus into a lady's room?" the señora asked suddenly, catching sight of the doctor, who was a stranger, and speaking with something of her old energy of tone.

"You have been ill for a few hours, madame," Doctor Benitez replied courteously, coming forward. "Pedro thought a doctor might help you, so he sent for me to come. Now that you are yourself again you will permit me to take my leave."

"Certainly, doctor; I would not think of detaining you from your duties. But it is strange that I should be ill, for I suffer no pain."

With some difficulty the physician succeeded in persuading her that she must resign herself to several days of rest in bed; then he left Ninfa to watch over the sick bed, and beckoned Luz to accompany him out of the room. They stood in the corridor, which was dark, except for the faint illu-

mination cast upward by the lighted lamp swung in the court below. The stars were brilliant overhead in the square of dark sky above, and the night air was cold and penetrating.

"I will send a nurse to care for the señora," the doctor said to Luz in business-like tones. "Yes, of course, it is natural that you should wish to do all that she will need, but it will be quite impossible, Señorita Barreda. You see for yourself that she is helpless now, and she will require the constant attention of a strong woman. Do not doubt, however, that you and your sister will be indispensable to her as long as she lives."

"Will she live and be like this?" Luz asked tremulously.

"She may live ten years, or she may quickly pass away under a second stroke," was the sorrowful reply; then, as Luz clasping her hands uttered a gasp of distress, he hastily changed his tone. "I am glad that she has grandchildren who owe her much. Your grandmother must be well nourished, señorita," he continued briskly. "Have the cook prepare beef broth, the first thing in the morning. I will come again by eight o'clock. Meantime, watch the lady carefully for the rest of the night, and be as soothing as possible. I think she will sleep. Send that excitable midget to bed right away, and take her place at the bedside. You are cool and quiet, but to-morrow you also must rest."

The physician's orders were faithfully carried out. With the daylight a pleasant-looking Mexican woman arrived to relieve the inexperienced girls of their responsibility, and little by little the wonted order returned to the house.

Day after day the señora lay almost motionless upon her bed, much of the time drowsing or asleep. When awake she was always restless unless one or both of the girls were within sight. Juana, the nurse, relieved them of the responsibility of nursing, yet the sick lady's happiest moments were passed with a granddaughter on each side of her couch. She relished their girlish chatter, and was always ready to hear Ninfa sing. Sometimes the girls sang together the hymns that had been favorites at the school, and the señora was often soothed to sleep by the sweetness of their blended voices.

At first Guadalupe and Maria and Pedro managed the household affairs between them, referring instinctively to Luz rather than to Ninfa for directions concerning such important questions as the kind of soup to be served for dinner, and whether the rice was to be cooked with tomatoes or with cinnamon and milk. When the cake woman rattled the chain at the corridor door, it was Luz who was summoned to select the delicate sweets from the huge shallow basket borne on the woman's head. And so it was with the various points of the household economy. Little by little it came to be un-

derstood that the tall, fair sister who seemed two years older than little Ninfa, was to step about the house in her grandmother's shoes, so to speak. Luz carried the purse for the daily expenses of the family, and every morning it became her custom to give Guadalupe the order for the day's purchases of meat, vegetables, and fruit. In the evening she was ready "to make the account"<sup>1</sup> with the servant of money expended during the day, and to mention any change desired in the quantity of bread bought of the baker when he should come around with his basket at an early hour the next day. The mysterious way in which money vanished in ordering such a household was a cause of much discomfort to Luz, who had long considered the expenditure of even so much as two *reales*<sup>2</sup> a day, a luxury indulged in only by the wealthy. Guadalupe seemed very unreasonable in her demands for one *real* for fruit "for the Señorita Ninfa, who could not live without her oranges and guavas," another for "*rosbif*"<sup>3</sup> perhaps, or fish, a handful of *centavos* for vegetables, another handful for charcoal, a few cents for sugar, and salt, and coffee or chocolate, while besides these daily expenses there were the baker, the *aguador*,<sup>4</sup> who brought his great red jars dripping from the fountain in the *plaza* several times a day, the cake woman, and a dozen others

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<sup>1</sup> *Hacer la cuenta.*<sup>2</sup> Twenty-five cents.<sup>3</sup> Roast beef.<sup>4</sup> Water-carrier.

who had claims upon the Barreda purse. The beggars too, were a trial to the young house-keeper.

"For the love of God, señorita," they would plead, arriving at the corridor gates in companies of twos and threes. "The dear lady, your *mamá*, never refused us. Give us an alms for the sake of the most holy Virgin. She will bless you and save you."

It was hard to turn them away empty-handed, since, as was very true, the lady of the house had never refused at least a *centavo* to the least deserving of them all. Luz felt herself to be weak in giving to some who were far more able-bodied than Don Luis or his wife had ever been, but she did not dare to raise the storm of reproaches at her own door which would have followed such a disregard of the customs of the house. She knew better than the señora could ever have known, that the "silent poor" are those oftenest needing aid, and she had not yet forgotten the many times when there had been no money in her home in Saltillo for buying even a bit of cheese to be eaten with the corn cakes, while the bitter, black coffee was often swallowed without a drop of milk or sweetening. Must one give to these critical, carping idlers, *centavos* "to shorten her days in purgatory" and "to save her soul"? Was this the meaning of charity?

For the hungry and sick there was always food in the Barrera kitchen, and Luz often gave it with her own hands, receiving blessings and adoration in return. Sometimes a poor feeble-minded creature, "*amado de Dios*,"<sup>1</sup> as such a one is called, would snatch her hand and cover it with kisses as she bent to fill the ragged hat or apron with bread, while inarticulate recommendations to the mercy of "*Nuestra Señora*"<sup>2</sup> issued from stammering lips.

The servants, in truth, stood somewhat in awe of the girl who, though a Protestant, proved herself quite capable of filling the señora's place, and though there were murmurings in private against the plague spot introduced into the family, which was worse by far than the blemish upon the name caused by Vicente's marriage with a *rancherita*, they did not dare to show to Luz or Ninfa any signs of their disapproval.

An event during the second week succeeding the señora's attack, was a visit from the advocate, Anselmo Cárdenas, Senior. In the capacity of family lawyer he called to put himself, his house, and all his possessions at the disposal of the family of his old friend. Luz learned from him something definite concerning her grandmother's resources and plans of expenditure, and the brown eyes of the lawyer sobered with feeling for this girl, who was

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<sup>1</sup> "Loved of God."

<sup>2</sup> Our Lady.

gradually assuming a position difficult enough as head of the house and informal guardian of her sister.

"It is not possible!" he said to himself, as he sat watching her, as she pored over a string of figures he had set down as a kind of guide for her future plans. "It is not only impossible, but it is against our custom, for two girls to live alone with an invalid old lady who will never be able to care for their worldly prospects. She is too pretty—both are too pretty to take the reins into their own hands. As to the little one the señora and I understand each other, I think, and she is safe, but this fair one—no, no, it must not be."

"You have some relative, I suppose, who will come to live with you now," the lawyer said aloud, as Luz folded up the paper with a sigh, yet with the pucker smoothed out of her forehead. "It is all very well for you, señorita, to hold the purse strings for the Señora Barreda, but there are other things to be considered."

"I know," Luz replied quietly. "My sister and I have been talking it over with our grandmother. We need no one, however, to take our grandmother's place while she is still with us. Indeed, we have no relations who could do so. We shall be very quiet, and Ninfa likes best to live at the *hacienda*—is it not so, *chiquita*?" she asked, turning to Ninfa who sat in embarrassed silence, and now blushed under the double gaze directed toward her.

"*Mamá* grows more restless every day, and wishes to go to the country away from the noise of the streets," Luz explained; "so we shall have to take her to El Dorado as soon as she is strong enough to bear the drive. I have never been there since I was a baby," she added brightly, "but I think I know the house and the beech trees and the kitchen court where the fennel grows, as well as if I had lived there always. Ninfa has described it all to me a hundred times."

"You do not know how *mamá* has changed, Señor Cárdenas," Ninfa exclaimed piteously. "She cannot do the least thing for herself. You cannot think how sad it is!"

"Then you *will* need some one to take her place, señorita," he said, returning to the subject from which he had been diverted.

"Juana will go with us to help us take care of *mamá*," Luz replied in her firm, soft voice, "and my *mamá*—Doña Teresa, who took care of me in Saltillo," she explained with some hesitation, "is to live with us also. Oh, we shall do very well."

"But you will marry, señorita," Don Anselmo said quickly, with the twinkle again in his eye, "and there will be your younger—I mean your twin sister to be thought of then."

"I shall not marry, señor," Luz said simply, as if to close the discussion and with a nervous flush upon her cheek, "and I shall take care of Ninfa."



Señor Anselmo Cárdenas then rose from his seat and took leave.

"Farewell, señoritas," he said. "Please remember that your grandmother's friend is ready to serve you at any time. If, for instance, anything more serious should happen to the Señora Barrera, I, as her lawyer, have her last will and testament in my keeping. It was made after she learned of your existence, Señorita Luz, and will be produced when required. Ah," he added, with a quick change of manner, and playfully tapping Ninfa's cheek with a slender forefinger, "this little girl will never choose a single life, eh, señorita? Some of us older people have secrets too, little one."

Then with profound bows and a fatherly smile for Ninfa, he left the *sala*, and old Pedro was soon heard ushering him through the portico below.

"Luz, what did he mean?" Ninfa asked, with the warm color still in her cheeks.

"That our grandmother and some of his family, perhaps Doña Marguerita, have been planning to marry you to his son, Anselmo Cárdenas," Luz answered bluntly. "I should think you would have understood that. As for me, I had begun to think that there was no Anselmo after all."

"*Ay de mí*, Lucita! That is the first unkind word you have ever spoken to me," Ninfa exclaimed, walking away from her sister with head erect and sparkling eyes.

Of course there had to be a swift making-up after this outburst and Ninfa was assured, over and over, that in her sister's eyes she was much too good for any Anselmito, howsoever honest his brown eyes. Yet Luz did not hesitate to say that she would like to see, for once, her sister's cavalier of the red steed and the glittering spurs, and she persisted in seeming unconvinced of his reality, even though Ninfa pleaded the closed drawing-room windows and the retirement of their life, as a reason for his invisibility.

"How do you know, *hermana mia*, that Anselmo does not ride past our house a dozen times a day?" Ninfa whispered that same night, mischief dimpling her face as they stopped to count the stars above the court. They had just left their grandmother's room and were on their way to bed.

"Perhaps he does, *quién sabe?*" Luz returned with a laugh. "But at the *hacienda* more than stone walls will separate you from the sight of him prancing by. How will you like that, Ninfa?"

"Have you forgotten that his aunt, Doña Marguerita, has promised to come and make *mamá* a long visit there during next year?" was the quick retort. "She says that she will have Anselmo come to escort her home again. How does that seem to you?"

## X

IF Ninfa had been less of a child, and if both sisters had known more of the gay world into which their grandmother's name might have introduced them, it would have been no more than natural that they should feel some pangs of disappointment at giving up their city home to be "buried in the dust of the *hacienda*."

It is true that as the traveling carriage bearing away the señora, Juana, and the twins, rolled slowly down the Calle del Seminario, Ninfa cast more than one backward glance at the stone balconies on the second floor of the Casa Barrera. From the last of these glances she drew in her head suddenly from the window of the carriage, with a vivid color bathing her cheeks and brow. In reply to Lucita's concerned question as to whether she had bumped her head violently, Ninfa only smiled in blushing confusion and pointed to the small square of glass set in the rear curtain of the carriage. Luz half arose from her seat beside her sister, opposite the señora and Juana, and peered out of the tiny window above her grandmother's pillow.

Then for the first time she saw young Cárdenas in all the brave attire of a Mexican gallant, seated

upon his red horse and following the carriage at a distance of a few yards. He seemed to restrain his horse with a good deal of difficulty, for the spirited Rosina was not accustomed to be held in check behind slow-going traveling carriages. Her innocent mind was not set upon escorting a sick old lady and two bright-eyed girls. She curvetted and pranced and gave her rider as much trouble as she could in his efforts to keep from riding down the people along the way. Toddling children, almost under the feet of the nervous horse gesticulated violently, exclaiming :

“*Mira ! mira ! el caballero bonito !*”<sup>1</sup>

The carriage rattled through the streets, the horseman keeping in the rear until the last paving stone was left behind, and the road lay half-a-foot deep in dust for many leagues ahead.

Half an hour afterward a wayside wine shop appeared in a group of *adobe* hovels, and the legend it bore across its glaring yellow front was, “The Tail of the Devil.”

As the carriage rolled slowly past this aptly named resort, Anselmo, having doubtless had his fill of the white dust and blazing sunlight, urged Rosina to make a sudden plunge forward, and for an instant the handsome pair appeared alongside of the carriage, just opposite Ninfa’s open window.

In a flash the dove-colored *sombrero* was raised,

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<sup>1</sup> “Look ! look ! the beautiful horseman !”

and the curly head underneath bowed low over the pommel of the saddle, and in the next instant Anselmo Cárdenas' brown eyes swept the interior of the carriage, and a smile gave an additional curl to the ends of his mustache.

"*Adios, señoritas,*" he cried softly, "and may your journey come to a happy end!"

Then he whirled Rosina around and they set off at a sweeping gallop in the direction of the city.

"What is it?" the señora asked in alarm, rousing from a doze.

"Only a friend of the señoritas to say '*Adios,*' señora," Juana answered soothingly. "Now we are really off, you see, and you will soon find yourself at the *hacienda*. Look at the flocks of sheep going by. *Valgame!* what a dust they make! And to think that we are to have no more rain till June!"

"Now, Luz, was that the spirit of a man, or a real Anselmo?" Ninfa whispered to her sister. "Did you not see him, my soul, and hear him speak?"

"It must be a great deal of trouble to have a *novio*," Luz said loftily. "One is always uncertain as to when he is to appear. I am sure that if he is not a spirit, he is as startling as if he were. He made my heart jump with fright when he plunged up to the window."

"Ah, but that is just what is so delightful, Lucita

*mia*," Ninfa exclaimed delightedly. "It would be stupid to have a *novio* around all the time, with Pedro to let him in and out, just like other people. It is the surprises and the nice little frights that make it so interesting. Anselmo is a splendid *novio*; one could never grow tired of the sight of him, when one never knows when he is to appear."

Whether Luz was prevailed upon by this argument to take Ninfa's point of view does not concern us now. Both girls were silent after this tilt of words between them, and the coach lumbered on until an hour past noon, when the low walls of the *hacienda* of El Dorado came into view.

Every inhabitant of the village had turned out into the crooked street to welcome home the señora and her family. Dogs barked, babies crowed, women waved their *rebozos*, and men stood with bare heads as the carriage rolled by. There was no vociferous demonstration of welcome from the grown people, on account of the sad fate which had returned the Señora Barrera to them.

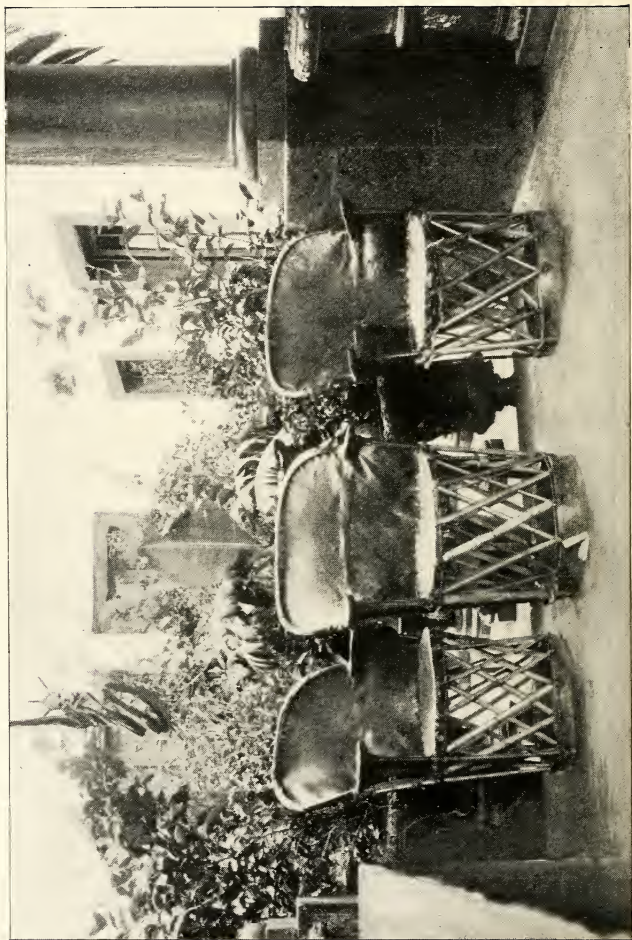
"*Ay de mi!* There she lies, poor soul, not able to lift hand or foot," they whispered among themselves. "Old Prieto, the *viejeto*,<sup>1</sup> says that she has only the strength of a babe, and that the young ladies nurse her all day long, bless them!"

"There she is, the Señorita Ninfa! See her bright eyes and the roses in her cheeks. But look!

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<sup>1</sup> Aged man.





"The flower-filled court."



look! the other is on the other side. Mother of God! she is like our Lady herself. What a smile! what eyes! what features of an angel!"

Amid these wondering comments along the way, the great gates of the courtyard were reached, and the carriage was driven through and up to the very door of one of the rooms. Four stout *peons* lifted the stricken lady from the improvised couch of carriage cushions and bore her to her own bed.

Long hours of exhaustion followed the first excitement caused by this return, and it seemed at one time as if the señora would never again leave her bed.

After a time, however, she rallied, and by the time the wheeled chair, long ago ordered from Texas, reached the *hacienda*, the señora was able to be placed in it and rolled out into the court.

The long, low house of *adobes*, plastered over with mortar and colored a light green, was very different in style and furnishings from the noble house left behind in the city, fifteen leagues away.

No one, however, seemed to regret the change, Luz, least of all, for the pleasant one-storied house, opening out upon the flower-filled court, did not present such intricacies of internal management as had the Casa Barrada.

So the town house was in the end let to strangers upon the advice of the lawyer, Anselmo Cárdenas, and life at the *hacienda* settled into a smooth routine of uneventful days.

The señora would recline in her chair for hours in the sunshine, with her lap filled with flowers, smiling contentedly at her granddaughters reading or sewing near by in the shade of the house wall. Though she was as helpless as an infant, her placid content exacted from all around her the loving care that Mexicans are wont to expend upon the afflicted ones of their families.

One strange fancy the señora had which endeared her much to the swarthy families of peons who worked on the banana plantation. A brown-skinned little fellow of nine or ten years of age had been left an orphan and dependent upon an aged uncle for a home and food. This boy, who chanced to enter the señora's courtyard one day on an errand with the cook, passed near the wheeled chair and was immediately accosted by the occupant.

"Ah, there is another Justo!" the lady cried in her high thin voice, and with a pleased smile. "Come here, child, and speak to me. Ninfa, he is like our Justo, with his bold brow and solemn eyes. Give the boy a large piece of Teresa's *pan dulce*,<sup>1</sup> and see that he comes to us again to-morrow."

After that day the child was virtually adopted into the household, as his presence seemed in some mysterious way to give pleasure to the señora. Her eyes would follow him about the court in his barefooted gambols with dog or goat, and it was

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<sup>1</sup> Cake.

not long before the boy himself forgot that he had ever had another name than that of Justo.

After as little delay as possible, Teresa with the baby had arrived at the ranch, having been gladly summoned from Saltillo by the señora, and was installed as assistant housekeeper, much to Lucita's satisfaction. Pepito grew plump and merry, and browner than ever, tumbling in the sand of the kitchen court with Justo as his devoted guardian.

By degrees the Señora Barreda recovered sufficient of her own strength to assist Teresa by her counsel and so relieve Luz of the administration of household affairs, although no longer able to preside in person over every detail, as had hitherto been the custom of the indefatigable *hacendada*.<sup>1</sup> One granddaughter or the other was rarely absent from the invalid's side. When the sun stood high over the court of the flowers, the great chair was carefully wheeled into the shaded *sala*, where the señora might take her *siesta*, reclining upon the rubber cushions, undisturbed by the shouts of the children at play over the wall in the outer court. The early and late hours of the day were spent in one or the other of the courts, with Luz and Ninfa at their sewing beside her chair, or reading aloud in turn from the books brought home from school.

The useless limbs gave the grandmother no pain, and though the helplessness of the white hand rest-

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<sup>1</sup> Lady owner of the ranch.

ing upon her lap in pathetic idleness sent many a pang to the hearts of the twins, the lady herself showed unexpected resignation to the loss of the vigor of her old age. Troubled by few things, she enjoyed the world directly within her ken, doting upon her granddaughters and finding in their caressing love a balm for all that she had lost. Their simple talk about the Protestant school, which could not well be kept out of their conversation altogether, began erelong to interest her in spite of herself and her prejudices. The old, proud fire of her eyes was more and more replaced, as she gazed upon her children, by the gentle eagerness of one who thought much and who was slowly finding something new and sweet in her contemplations.

The Bibles were no longer forbidden books, and more than once during the first weeks following the removal to the *hacienda*, the señora asked that certain portions referred to by Luz or Ninfa in their talk might be read aloud to her.

As she watched the girls at work among the flowers, or bending over their embroidery frames, in rare moments of silence the señora's meditations sometimes took such shape as this :

"The children are teaching me many things. At last I begin to see that the Bible is a book to be read and to be understood, even by the unlearned, whatever the priests may say. Surely if such a child as my Ninfa may read it and obey its

teachings in her innocent youth, an old woman such as I am need fear no evil from the same teachings. Every day they shall read it to me, and if obeying its commands means Protestantism, then—who knows?—even I may not want to disobey. How well it was that I had not really burned the books when the stroke of God fell upon me.”

With all the help afforded by Doña Teresa and the nurse, Juana, there were many light duties to occupy the sisters during the long, bright days before the sudden twilights fell and the stars rose over the hilltops. There were the flowers to be tended, in their great earthen jars, and the vigorous smilax vines to be trained carefully over the face of the whitewashed wall of the corridor. On most days there was a little studying to be done, when Luz smoothed Ninfa’s road to learning.

What if the English learned at school languished by degrees from disuse, and the quaint old piano in the *sala* gave forth an uncertain sound in response to the touch of warm, brown fingers? The best lessons learned during Ninfa’s short school term still held fast in her memory and bore fruit in her life. The green-covered Bible revealed, day by day, many truths to the simple hearts seeking them, which have been hid from “the wise and prudent” through all the ages.

On some evenings, when work was laid aside and a sudden shower of the rainy season had

driven them from the dampness of the court to the candle-lighted *sala* inside, Teresa was to be coaxed into telling of the peasant *mamá* who rode away from Las Rosas one fine day at the side of the handsome Vicente, and even the señora learned, for the children's sake, to listen calmly to the simple recital of Manuela's goodness and cleverness in the poor little home beyond the mountains. On one occasion Teresa gave the reins to her fancy, and from telling of the peasant bride, began to picture the day to come when, instead of a rough mountain pony, a shining coach would enter the gates of El Dorado only to turn again and bear Ninfa away toward the city—— But here the señora was quick to cry "Enough!" The simple-hearted Teresa must not pry too curiously into what the future must bring. Not yet would the grandmother allow herself to be reminded of the inevitable day to arrive when Ninfa should transfer her sweet despotism from herself to Rosina's young master. One day during the following summer, Luz received a letter from a missionary worker in a neighboring State, offering her a position as teacher in the school connected with one of the mission-stations there. This letter was immediately shared with the grandmother and Ninfa, while Teresa stood by to hear the reading. The foster mother's heart swelled with proud satisfaction. She wished that Luis might have been alive to hear it with her.

Quite different from Teresa's sensations were those of Ninfa on hearing the proposition which would again deprive her of her sister who had indeed become as dear to her as her own self, according to the prediction of Prieto. With characteristic abandon she therefore set herself in opposition to the plan.

"She shall not go from us, *mamá*," she exclaimed indignantly, falling upon her knees and resting her head in the old, coaxing manner against the grandmother's shoulder. "We cannot spare our Luz now, can we, dearest? Speak, *mamá*, and say that she shall never leave us."

The señora's eyes searched Lucita's face before her lips opened for a reply to Ninfa. Luz met the glance and smiled, Vicente's own smile, and the señora, suppressing a sigh, turned her gaze to the eager, dark face against her shoulder.

"The letter speaks of the late autumn as the time for the school to open, Ninfa," she said at last. "So, even if we agree to send Luz from us, there will be many weeks before the time comes for the separation. Luz, herself, shall decide, for she is now a woman and wise for her age. If she goes she will return after a while, and it will not be as though we had lost her again. Luz, do you wish to teach this school? The work will be hard and you have no need to work, as you well know."

"It is to teach the Bible, *mamá*," Luz answered,

softly, with an arm thrown across the back of her grandmother's chair. "I could not leave you and Ninfa and our Teresa and Pepito for anything else."

"What was it you read this morning, Lucita, while Ninfa brushed my hair?" the señora asked thoughtfully, stroking Ninfa's bowed head. "It was something about leaving home and mothers and sisters, was it not? I do not remember the words very well, but you who carry in your memory so many wise sayings from the book will recall them to my mind. Hush, Ninfa," she added, "why should you weep so bitterly? Luz is not yet gone. Listen, little star of my soul, she will tell us something from the book you cherish."

"Was it this, *mamá*? 'Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit everlasting life.'"

"Yes, yes," the señora murmured musingly. "Strange words and bold. Yet, if the Lord said them, they must be true."

"And Luz will go?" Ninfa asked, in smothered accents from her grandmother's shoulder.

The reply came from Luz herself, whose sweet lips quivered, though a steadfast light shone in her gray eyes. "Yes, Ninfa, I shall go."

And Teresa, standing by, rejoiced, forgetting all



else in the thought that now truly Luz was to become the teacher of "a roomful of *niñas*."

Such would surely be no uncomely sight, and if it should mean hard work and a lonely life, are not hard work and lonely hours for thought and aspiration sure stepping-stones in the midst of the flood of life's hurry and turmoil?



## APPENDIX I

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Translated paragraph from "*El Testigo*," published in Guadalajara, Mexico (Congregational Mission), March 15, 1896.

"GO TO JOSEPH."

Such is the title of a newspaper paragraph in the so-called "Friend of the Truth."

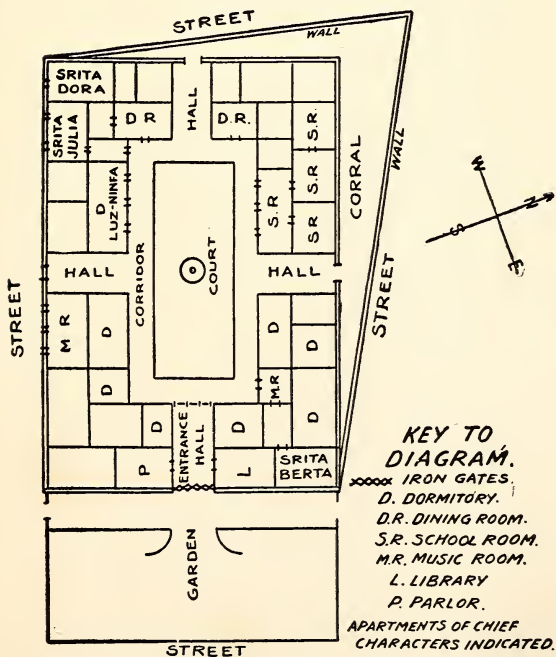
After mentioning some expressions of adulation of St. Joseph, which it is said the Virgin used in speaking with St. Bridget, the writer remarks: "For this, the Fathers and Doctors of the Church . . . do not hesitate to declare, *following the sacred text*, that our salvation is in his hands, because he is able, by his intercession, to accomplish what Mary can by privilege and Jesus by his own will. *Ite ad Joseph*, Gen. 41 : 55."

We cannot believe that the author of these lines is ignorant of the fact that the words which he quotes from the book of Genesis were uttered, not by divine inspiration, but by a *heathen* king, who sent the people, not to gain the salvation of their souls, but to buy *food* for themselves and their cattle, to Joseph, *the son of Jacob*, who died about seventeen hundred years before the birth of Joseph, "the husband of Mary, and reputed father of Jesus." Therefore, the effrontery with which

the Romanists declare that they "*follow the sacred text*" when they counsel the people to have recourse to Joseph, is inexpressible and almost incomprehensible. And to write above this the name of "Friend of the TRUTH"!

## APPENDIX II

### *DIAGRAM OF MADERO INSTITUTE. GROUND PLAN.*





## APPENDIX III

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Extract from the introduction to "*El Nuevo Testamento de Nuestro Señor Jesucristo: con notas ; y además con índices historico, cronologico, de sentencias sagradas, y de las epistolas y evangelios para todos los domingos del año.* Londres, 1874."

The reading of the Holy Bible has received the express sanction of his holiness the pope, Pius VI., according to this letter, addressed to the archbishop of Florence, the most illustrious and reverend Antonio Martini :

"Very dear Son :

"Health and blessing in our Lord.

"When a deluge of evil books which so grossly attack the Catholic religion, circulates even among the unlearned, thou art very seasonable in judging that the faithful should with great ardor be incited to a reading of the sacred Scriptures. They are truly most abundant fountains, which ought to be open to all, in order that they may imbibe from them purity of habits and of doctrine, and that the errors so extensively disseminated in these corrupt times may be dissipated. This thou hast done opportunely, as thou dost aver, publishing these same Holy Scriptures in the language of thy country, within reach of every one. . . We commend,

therefore, thy undoubted learning, united with thy great piety; and we give thee due thanks for the books which thou hast had the care to submit to us, which we shall read, even though it be but lightly, as soon as possible. Meanwhile, as a pledge of our pontifical benevolence, receive our apostolic benediction, which we send most lovingly to thee, dear son.

“Given in Rome on the Kalends of April, 1778, in the fourth year of our Pontificate.

FELIPPE BUONAMICCI,

*Latin Secretary.*”

PIUS P. P. VI.









